



THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
**THE DUTCH
GOLDEN AGE**

Edited by **Helmer J. Helmers**
and **Geert H. Janssen**



The Cambridge Companion to
the Dutch Golden Age

During the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic was transformed into a leading political power in Europe, with global trading interests. It nurtured some of the period's greatest luminaries, including Rembrandt, Vermeer, Descartes, and Spinoza. Long celebrated for its religious tolerance, artistic innovation, and economic modernity, the United Provinces of the Netherlands also became known for their involvement with slavery and military repression in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. This *Companion* provides a compelling overview of the best scholarship on this much debated era, written by a wide range of experts in the field. Unique in their balanced treatment of global, political, socio-economic, literary, artistic, religious, and intellectual history, its nineteen chapters offer an indispensable guide for anyone interested in the world of the Dutch Golden Age.

HELMER J. HELMERS is assistant professor in early modern Dutch literature and culture at the University of Amsterdam. His previous publications include *The Royalist Republic: Literature, Politics, and Religion in the Anglo-Dutch Public Sphere, 1639–1660* (Cambridge, 2015).

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the Dutch Golden Age

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	x
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiv
<i>Notes on Terminology</i>	xv
<i>Chronology of the Dutch Golden Age</i>	xvi
<i>Maps</i>	xxi

Introduction: Understanding the Dutch Golden Age	1
HELMER J. HELMERS AND GEERT H. JANSSEN	

Part I Space and People 13

1 Urbanization	15
MAARTEN PRAK	
2 Water and Land	32
J. L. PRICE	
3 Migration	49
GEERT H. JANSSEN	

Part II A State of War 67

4 The Armed Forces	69
PEPIJN BRANDON	
5 The Cult and Memory of War and Violence	87
JUDITH POLLMANN	

Part III Political Culture 105

6 The Body Politic	107
DAVID ONNEKINK	

- 7 Popular Participation and Public Debate 124
HELMER J. HELMERS

Part IV Economy and Trade 147

- 8 A Market Economy 149
DANIELLE VAN DEN HEUVEL

- 9 Global Trade 166
MICHEL VAN GROESEN

Part V Religious Culture 187

- 10 Reformed Protestantism 189
CHARLES H. PARKER

- 11 Religious Tolerance 208
CHRISTINE KOOI

- 12 Spiritual Culture 225
ANGELA VANHAELEN

Part VI Art and Literature 247

- 13 The Markets for Art, Books, and Luxury Goods 249
CLAARTJE RASTERHOFF

- 14 Genre Painting 268
WAYNE FRANITS

- 15 The World of Literature 289
THEO HERMANS

- 16 Dutch Classicism in Europe 308
STIJN BUSSELS

Part VII Realms of Knowledge 331

- 17 Education 333
DIRK VAN MIERT

- 18 Science and Technology 350
HAROLD J. COOK

- 19 Radical Thought 370
JONATHAN ISRAEL

Epilogue: The Legacy of the Dutch Golden Age	390
HELMER J. HELMERS AND GEERT H. JANSSEN	

<i>Glossary</i>	400
<i>Further Reading</i>	402
<i>Index</i>	414

Figures

- 0.1 Dirck Hals, *Garden Party*, 1627, Rijksmuseum page 5
- 1.1 Jacob van Ruysdael, *View of Haarlem*, 1650s, Rijksmuseum 26
- 2.1 Jan Asselijn, *Breach of St Anthony's Dyke*, 1651, Rijksmuseum 37
- 3.1 Jan Mijtens, *Portrait of Margaretha van Raephorst*, 1668, Rijksmuseum 63
- 4.1 Timeline of armed conflicts in Europe involving the Dutch Republic 74
- 5.1 Anonymous, *The Massacre of Naarden*, c. 1615, memorial plaque on the façade of the Spanish House in Naarden. Photo: Mart Hagenbeek, www.gevelstenen.net/kerninventarisatie 94
- 5.2 Frans Bruynen, *Tandem Fit Surculus Arbor*, allegorical print, 1627, Rijksbureau Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD) 98
- 7.1 Salomon Savery (attr.), *'Op de Waeg-schael'*, 1618, Rijksmuseum 144
- 8.1 Nicolaes Maes, *The Spinner*, 1650s, Rijksmuseum 150
- 8.2 *Centsprent Westfaalse Geesje*, 1760s, Rijksmuseum 158
- 9.1 Hendrik Vroom, *The Return to Amsterdam of the Second Expedition to the East Indies*, 1599, Rijksmuseum 168
- 9.2 Anonymous, *City plan of Batavia*, 1681, Nationaal archief, The Hague 177
- 9.3 Anonymous, *City plan of Recife*, s.d., Nationaal archief, The Hague 177
- 9.4 Zacharias Wagner, *Slave Market at Recife*, 1630s–1640s, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz 181
- 11.1 Rembrandt, *The Syndics*, 1662, Rijksmuseum 222
- 12.1 Emanuel de Witte, *Portuguese Synagogue*, 1680, Rijksmuseum 227
- 12.2 Gerrit Berckheyde, *Dam Square*, 1672, Rijksmuseum 230
- 12.3 Elias Scerpswert, *Bust of Saint Frederick*, 1362, Rijksmuseum 236
- 12.4 Anonymous, *Niche commemorating the Heilige Stede*, Amsterdam. Author's photograph 238
- 12.5 Jan van der Heyden, *Room Corner with Curiosities*, 1712, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest 243

- 13.1 Estimates of the number of painters and publishers active in the Dutch Republic, 1580–1700 (five-year moving average, semi-logarithmic scale) 251
- 13.2 Device of the Amsterdam printer Iohannes van den Berg in Laurens van Zanten, *Spiegel der gedenckweerdigste wonderen en geschiedenissen onses tijds*, 1661, Royal Library, The Hague 259
- 13.3 Esaias van de Velde, *A View in the Dunes*, 1629, Rijksmuseum 260
- 14.1 Gerrit van Honthorst, *Allegory of Lust*, 1628, Private collection 270
- 14.2 Gerard ter Borch, *Curiosity*, c. 1660, Metropolitan Museum of Art 271
- 14.3 Pieter de Hooch, *A Mother with Her Children and a Servant*, c. 1675, private collection 273
- 14.4 David Vinckboons, *Country Fair*, c. 1629, Mauritshuis 274
- 14.5 Jacob Ochtervelt, *Musical Company in an Interior*, c. 1670, Cleveland Museum of Art 277
- 14.6 Adriaen van Ostade, *Carousing Peasants*, c. 1635, private collection 279
- 14.7 Adriaen van Ostade, *Interior of a Peasant Cottage*, 1661, private collection 280
- 14.8 Adriaen van Ostade, *Family Saying Grace*, 1653, Rijksmuseum 282
- 14.9 Johannes Vermeer, *The Lacemaker*, c. 1670–1, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo copyright RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY 285
- 16.1 Jan Matthysz after Pieter Jansz Post, *Sectional View of Huis ten Bosch*, 1655, Rijksmuseum 309
- 16.2 Gerard van Honthorst, *Amalia and Her Daughters*, Oranjezaal, 1650s, Koninklijke Verzamelingen, The Hague 310
- 16.3 Jacob Jordaens, *Frederick Henry as a Roman triumphator*, 1650s, Koninklijke verzamelingen, The Hague 311
- 16.4 Anonymous, *View of Meat Market in Haarlem*, 1855, Rijksmuseum 317
- 16.5 Theodor Matham, *Front Sight of the House of Constantijn Huygens*, 1639, Rijksmuseum 319
- 16.6 Façade of the Riddarhuset, 1641–7, photo by Ankara (Wikimedia Commons) 320
- 16.7 Rembrandt, *Female Nude, Sitting on a Platform*, 1629–33, Rijksmuseum 324
- 17.1 Detail of the title page of *Le Gazophylace De la Langue Française et Flamende, dat is Schat-kamer der Nederduytsche en Francoysche Tale*, 1654, Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam 340
- 20.1 Johannes Vermeer, *Milkmaid*, c. 1660, Rijksmuseum 391

Tables

- 3.1 Migration and urban growth in Holland (estimates) *page* 52
- 4.1 The military labour market 82

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Acknowledgements

Until not so long ago, to study the Dutch Golden Age meant learning Dutch first. Outside art history, the scholarship on the culture and history of the Dutch Republic was written for the most part by Dutch historians, and mostly in Dutch. Primary sources, too, had been only haphazardly translated into English, German, and French. The vibrant history of one of the most remarkable countries in early modern Europe had effectively been put behind lock and key for generations of non-Dutch students who did not have the time or stamina to learn the Dutch language. In recent decades, this has changed considerably. From the 1990s onwards, a productive and highly visible generation of both Anglophone and Dutch scholars have published major works on the Golden Age in English, thereby opening up the relatively closed world of Dutch scholarship and enthusing a large international public for the subject. Providing a broad overview of a thriving and by now thoroughly international field of study, this book very much builds on their collective work.

In editing this book, we have profited from the stimulating environment offered by the University of Amsterdam. We are also grateful for the support of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Huntington Library, San Marino. The wonderful people at Cambridge University Press could not have been more helpful and supportive, and Karen Anderson's careful editing has been indispensable in turning our manuscript into a book. Anne-Rieke van Schaik did a great job on the index. It was the exchange students in our English-language courses on the Dutch Golden Age who first opened our eyes to the need for and potential of a *Companion* on the subject. It is to all those talented time travellers around the world this book is dedicated.

Notes on Terminology

Changing borders and linguistic preferences in seventeenth-century Europe can be confusing, and a few words on the use of terminology may therefore be helpful. Regarding place names we follow common practice in English, which is not always consistent. Notably, the towns of Den Haag and Antwerpen have been anglicized (The Hague, Antwerp), but not Leiden or Vlissingen. It has long been customary in academic scholarship to adopt the geographical vocabulary of Dutch colonialists when referring to their conquered possessions in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. For pragmatic reasons this companion follows common practice but also provides alternative, current names where possible. Batavia (Jakarta), New Amsterdam (New York City), and Formosa (Taiwan) are cases in point. The personal names and titles of the leading aristocratic family in the Dutch Republic, the House of Orange-Nassau, have been anglicized throughout. Stadhouder Frederik Hendrik thus becomes Stadholder Frederick Henry and the Brazilian governor Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen is here referred to as John Maurice of Nassau-Siegen. The names of other statesmen (e.g. Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Johan de Witt) are given in Dutch. The irregular use of patronyms in seventeenth-century Dutch calls for pragmatism. Jan Pieterszoon Coen has been spelled out, but Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn just becomes Rembrandt – as the master himself liked it.

Chronology of the Dutch Golden Age

War and peace	Domestic politics	Economy and global presence	Arts and publishing
1579: Union of Utrecht			1575: Leiden University established; 1580: William of Orange's <i>Apology</i>
1585: Taking of Antwerp by Habsburg forces	1584: William of Orange assassinated in Delft 1585–1625: Maurice of Nassau stadholder		1585: Franeker University established; 1586: Coornhert, <i>Zedekunst</i>
1590–1600: Maurice of Nassau's reconquests	1585–1609: Holland and Zeeland towns accommodate immigrants from Southern Netherlands	1595–7: First voyages to East Indies	1596: Jan Huygen van Linschoten's <i>Itinerario</i> ; Stevin, <i>Constructing Fortifications</i>
1600: Battle of Nieuwpoort	1586–1618: Oldenbarnevelt Land's Advocate of Holland	1600: Dutch ship <i>De Liefde</i> reaches Japan	1604: Karel van Mander's <i>Schilder-Boeck</i>
1609–21: Twelve Years' Truce	1606–9: Debates on peace	1602: VOC founded	1608: Teellinck, <i>Philopatris</i>
1609–10: States Army under Maurice besieges Jülich	1610: Arminians submit their <i>Remonstrance</i>	1607–12: Beemster polder 1609: Amsterdam Exchange Bank	1609: Hugo Grotius' <i>Mare liberum</i> 1611: Bourse of Amsterdam built by Hendrick de Keyser

(cont.)

War and peace	Domestic politics	Economy and global presence	Arts and publishing
1612: Maurice elevated to the Order of the Garter	1612: Jewish Synagogue opens in Amsterdam	1614: New Netherland established	1613: Heinsius' <i>Cupid's Craft</i>
1614: Second War of the Jülich Succession threatens Truce	1617–19: Arminian controversy; fall of Oldenbarnevelt regime; Synod of Dordt	1619: Batavia (Jakarta) becomes VOC headquarters in Asia	1617: Opening of the Nederduytsche Academie (Dutch Academy)
1618: Bohemian Revolt, start of Thirty Years War	1619: Execution of Oldenbarnevelt	1620s: Massacres at Banda Islands (Indonesia)	1617: Bredero, <i>Spaansche Brabander</i>
1620: Fall of Prague; king of Bohemia flees to The Hague	1621: Anthonie Duyck grand pensionary of Holland	1620: Pilgrim Fathers leave Leiden	1618: First newspaper published in Amsterdam
1621: Truce ends		1621: WIC founded	
		1623: Amboyna massacre	1621: Starter, <i>Friesche Lusthof</i> (songbook)
1625: Breda taken by Spanish	1625–47: Frederick Henry stadholder	1625: Fortress at New Amsterdam (New York)	1625: Cats, <i>Houwelick</i>
			1625: Vondel's <i>Palamedes</i>
1629: Imperial troops briefly occupy Amersfoort; Frederick Henry takes Den Bosch	1629–31: Jacob Cats grand pensionary of Holland	1628: Piet Heyn captures Spanish silver fleet near Matanzas (Cuba)	1626: Elzevier printer of Leiden University
			1629: Honthorst, <i>Allegory of Lust</i>
1630: Peace negotiations with Spain	1631–6: Adriaan Pauw grand pensionary of Holland	1630–54: Dutch in Brazil	1634: Van Ostade, <i>Carousing Peasants</i>
1632: Frederick Henry takes Maastricht			1637: Descartes' <i>Discours de la méthode</i>
1635: Treaty with France	1636–51: Jacob Cats grand pensionary of Holland	1637: Dutch take slave-trading fortress of Elmina (Ghana) from Portuguese; tulip mania	1637: States' Bible published
			1638: Amsterdam Theatre opens
1637: Frederick Henry takes Breda	1638: Maria de Medici visits Amsterdam	1639: VOC becomes Japan's exclusive European trading partner	1640: Lakenhal built in Leiden
			1642: Rembrandt paints <i>Night Watch</i> ; Hooft's <i>Dutch Histories</i>

(cont.)

War and peace	Domestic politics	Economy and global presence	Arts and publishing
1642–8: English Civil Wars	1641: William II marries Mary Stuart	1640s: VOC conquers Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Malacca (Malaysia)	1645: Bontius, <i>Siege of Leiden</i> (play)
1643–5: Wappinger War in New Netherland	1647: Frederick Henry dies		1647–55: Amsterdam Town Hall built
1648: Peace of Münster	1647–50: William II stadholder	1642–4: Abel Tasman reaches Tasmania and New Zealand	1648–50: Huis ten Bosch decorated 1650: Casteleyn's <i>Hollandtsche Mercurius</i>
1650: William II assaults Amsterdam, dies of smallpox soon afterwards	1651: <i>Grote vergadering</i> States General	1651: English Act of Navigation	
1652–4: First Anglo-Dutch War	1650–72: Stadholderless regime		1653: Huygens, <i>Hofwijck</i>
1653: Battle of Ter Heijde, first naval battle in Anglo-Dutch War	1653–72: Johan de Witt grand pensionary 1653: Orangist riots in Holland and Zeeland	1652: VOC settles at Cape Colony (South Africa)	1654: Vondel, <i>Lucifer</i> 1654: Rembrandt, <i>Portrait of Jan Six</i>
1658–60: War in Sound with Sweden; Dutch alliance with France and England (Haags Concert)	1660: Controversy on the education of William III	1661: VOC lose Formosa (Taiwan) to Chinese	c. 1658: Vermeer, <i>The Milkmaid</i> 1662: Rembrandt, <i>Syndics</i> ; Blaeu's <i>Atlas Maior</i>
1664–7: Second Anglo-Dutch War 1665–6: First Munster War	1666: Orangist Captain Buat executed for high treason in The Hague.	1667: English take New Netherland, including New Amsterdam; Dutch acquire Suriname	1668: Koerbagh's radical treatise <i>A Light Shining in Dark Places</i> published
1668: Triple Alliance between Dutch Republic, England, and Sweden		1667: Makassar (Sulawesi) taken by VOC	1670: Spinoza's <i>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i>

(cont.)

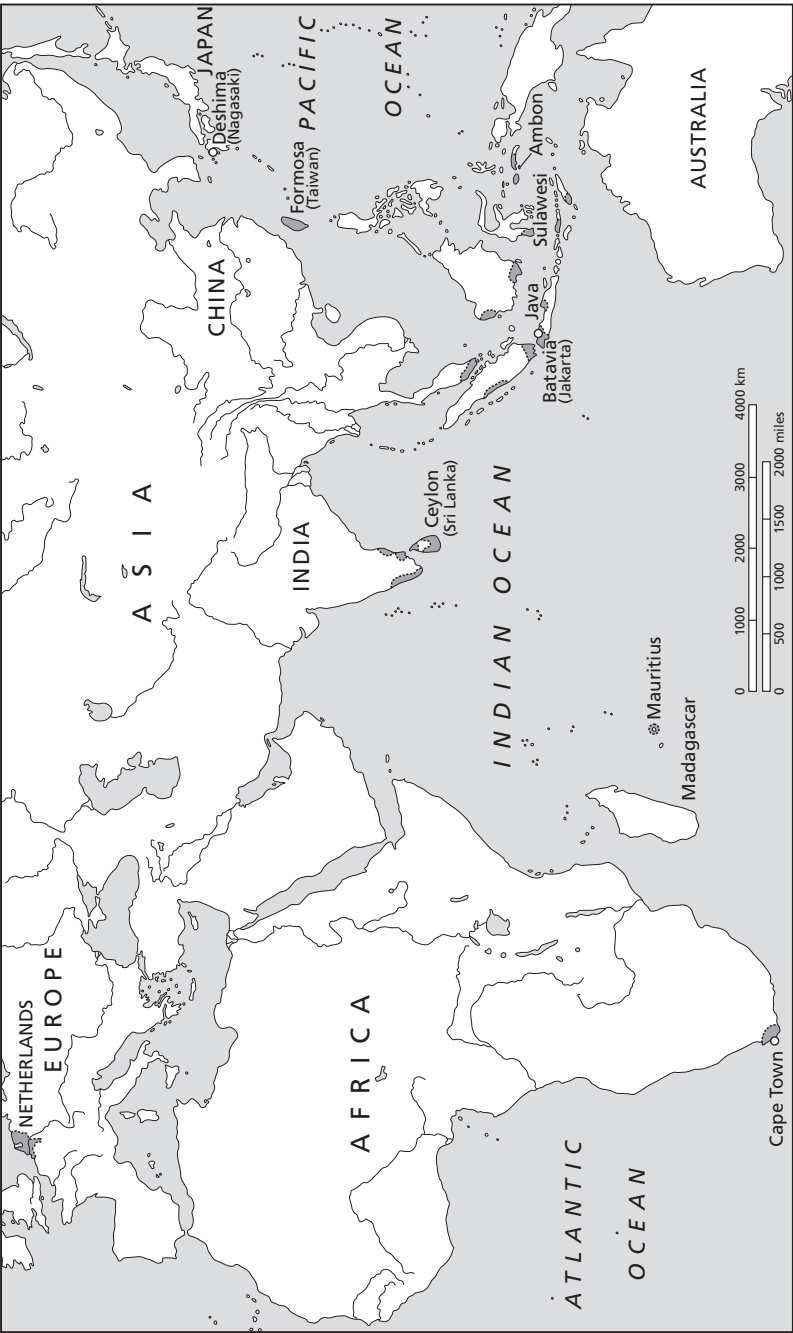
War and peace	Domestic politics	Economy and global presence	Arts and publishing
1672: Invasions by France, Cologne, and Münster; Third Anglo-Dutch War 1678: Peace of Nijmegen	1672–1702: William III stadholder 1672–88: Gaspar Fagel grand pensionary of Holland	1674: WIC dismantled	1675: Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam
1685: Revocation of Edict of Nantes	1685: Influx of Huguenot refugees	1684: VOC makes peace with Bantam	1686–92: Loo Palace built
1688: Invasion of England by William III	1692: William III intervenes in religious conflict between Cocceians and Voetians		1688: William III's <i>Declaration of Reasons</i> published
1697: Peace of Rijswijk			1690: Christiaan Huygens' <i>Traité de la lumière</i>



Map 1. Map of the Dutch Republic



Map 2. Map of Dutch territories in the Atlantic



Map 3. Map of Dutch territories in the Indian and Pacific Oceans

Introduction: Understanding the Dutch Golden Age

Even today few people are unaffected by the term ‘Dutch Golden Age’. So commonly has the phrase been applied to the Dutch seventeenth century in, for instance, museums, (art) history books, and tourist guides that it seldom fails to conjure up a range of iconic associations. For many, it will evoke pictures by Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, or one of the many other only slightly less famous painters. Others associate it primarily with Dutch economic prosperity and the Republic’s trade empire, and might envision the rich merchant houses along the Amsterdam canals, Delftware, or the great East Indiamen of the VOC. Some will think of one or two of the many wars fought by the Dutch Republic, most likely the Revolt against Habsburg Spain, the three naval wars against England, or the battles against Louis XIV’s France. Grotius, Huygens, Spinoza, and the great intellectual achievements of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic might be less prominent in the minds of most people, as would be the rest of its immense textual heritage, but still one can expect one or two mentions from that field as well. And that is only scratching the surface: evidently, the Dutch Golden Age connotes a great many very disparate things that are nevertheless distinctive enough to be called Dutch.

All such – largely positive – associations are tinged with wonder. From the seventeenth century onwards, observers of the Dutch miracle have asked themselves how a small country, with barely two million inhabitants, could have achieved prominence in such varied fields of human endeavour and competition. Explanations, then and later, have ranged widely. Seventeenth-century Protestant observers were convinced that the Dutch were God’s chosen people, and their country a New Israel, which owed its prosperity to divine providence. Other

contemporaries, such as Hugo Grotius and William Temple, sought the explanation in the history of the Low Countries and the honest and simple character of its people. Modern scholars, by contrast, have stressed the innovative characteristics of the Dutch economy, the strength and flexibility of Dutch institutions, its deliberative political culture, and its well-financed, innovative, and powerful army.¹ Like their early modern counterparts, however, they have focused on the Republic's unique achievements and tended to locate the solution of the 'Dutch enigma', as Maarten Prak termed it, in the Dutch Republic itself.²

This, evidently, is what speaking of a 'Golden Age' encourages us to do: in modern usage, it commonly serves to celebrate the sum of all the great achievements of any national community in a certain period of time, whether it be the Spanish Golden Age, Victorian England, or the Dutch Golden Age. In this manner nineteenth-century historians applied it to the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Brimming with nostalgia, the term 'golden age' served to kindle the ambition of their own period to retrieve the national greatness of the past in the service of the nascent nation-state. This enterprise was remarkably successful. The Golden Age, both the phrase and the historical period it describes, became entrenched in Dutch memory, a cornerstone of Dutch national identity. Even today, many people in the Netherlands pride themselves on their glorious, enterprising history, much like the Victorian empire still inspires nostalgia and pride in Britain. Speaking of a Golden Age quite deliberately invites a focus on the nation.

There is an even older layer to the concept of the Golden Age that also resonates in modern usage. When early modern people thought about a Golden Age, they associated it with the classical literature of Ovid and Virgil, who had described the golden age in pastoral terms, as a time of innocence and leisure, when people lived peacefully in natural environments untainted by war. Joost van den Vondel, the Amsterdam poet laureate, translated Ovid to describe exactly this (writ. 1656, pub. 1671):

the Golden Age, which, inclined
To virtue, loved justice naturally.

...

It was forever spring, and the western breeze
In clear sunshine did with lukewarm breath caress
The flowers, which sprang from the earth afresh

The clay, untilled, freely supported grassy meadows,
 The field tirelessly yielded pregnant shafts of wheat.
 Honey and nectar flowed like water.³

This Edenic landscape, in which humans could live in prelapsarian bliss, and divine justice ruled, was truly the stuff of mythology, seemingly unconnected to Vondel's own day and age. Since this classical interpretation of the Golden Age dominated in the seventeenth century, it has long been thought that the modern idea of a Golden Age was applied to the Dutch Republic only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The phrase 'Dutch Golden Age' has yet to be found in seventeenth-century sources. Only in 1719, when the Dutch had begun to sense their diminished importance, did the painter Arnold Houbraken lament the end of 'the Golden Age' of Dutch art.⁴ Yet clearly both Vondel and his readers also associated the easy and carefree mythological era with their own period.

Indeed, seventeenth-century literature and art have done much to craft an image of the Dutch Golden Age as an age of bourgeois innocence, untouched by the harsh realities of money and power. This appears, for example, in another poem by Vondel, in which he applied the term to a new *polder*, the Beemster, which had recently been drained by Jan Adriaansz Leeghwater:

People dance and dine in the merchant's rich vicinity
 Here shines the Golden Age, in lovely bowers of bliss
 It fears not war, and circumnavigates all cliffs.⁵

This poem was written for one of the great investors in the ambitious land reclamation project, Karel Looten, whom Vondel praised for the Ovid-like metamorphosis of sea into land which his capital had brought about. Quite problematically, Vondel extolled the rich speculant's new-found leisure (on land that was also new) as a primordial state of innocence, a new beginning, thus providing the burgher audience with a self-congratulatory pastoral fantasy.⁶

In the mid seventeenth century, when the Republic was at the height of its power, such topical-pastoral images had become widespread. The idea that the Dutch Republic had recreated the Ovidian Golden Age clearly fuelled this fashion. Johan van Heemskerck's *Batavian Arcadia* (1637) is a case in point. This was a highly successful pastoral text in prose and rhyme, with realistic descriptions of peaceful Dutch

landscapes in which young amorous shepherds discussed recent Dutch history and the war with Spain. Explicitly designed to instil in Dutch youths a love for their country and pious awe for their Creator, *Batavian Arcadia* evidently played with the idea of a self-made Golden Age. Later estate poems such as Constantijn Huygens' *Hofwijck* (1653) and Jacob Cats' *Sorgh-vliet* (1655), helped by the fact that the words 'court' and 'garden' were homonyms in early modern Dutch, similarly described man-made Dutch Arcadias, peaceful gardens that were places of refuge from the hectic world of politics. In these poems, an elderly landowner could reflect in arcadian, aristocratic retreat on his own achievements as well as the recent turmoils of the state.⁷ In painting, too, Dutchified arcadias were all the rage. Inspired by pastoral scenes painted for the stadholder's court in the 1630s, burghers increasingly had themselves portrayed in pastoral surroundings.⁸ The bourgeois desire to escape from the bustle of their towns into fearless pastoral pastimes also underpins the immensely popular landscapes by Ruysdael, Hobbema, Potter, and others that held up agrarian idylls to their civic beholders, the plump cattle populating them connoting Dutch prosperity. Such textual and visual images helped to create a notion of the Dutch Golden Age as a peaceful age of sociable bourgeois free living. This image was created by and for a burgher class that was responding to the new realities of city life in the most urbanized part of Europe, and that loved to revel in, or dream of, the innocent countryside. Celebrating its own almost godlike, land-creating achievements, this class went from waves to wealth and wanted to know it.

Dirck Hals' famous *Garden Party* (*Buitenpartij*), with its gathering of fashionable city folk, offers a wonderful illustration of this pastoral ideal (Figure 0.1). Showing a prosperous burgher company in a presumably Dutch countryside, Hals depicted exactly the kind of gathering Vondel referred to. Yet his painting also reveals some of the tensions inherent in that ideal. The conspicuous display of rich clothing, for instance, contrasts sharply with the simplicity of Golden Age shepherds. The introduction of exotic elements such as the chained monkey and the parrots, but also the Italianate architecture of the country house in the background, complicate Vondel's *polder* poetry, suggest a desire to be more or even other than Dutch, and hint at the world of commerce and travel that introduced them. Finally, the sword and the ruinous remains of a pillar in the foreground are indications



Figure 0.1 Dirck Hals, *Garden Party*, 1627.

that Hals' peaceful idyll is in fact situated in a landscape that has seen its share of violence and decay.

Then as now, the glitter of a Golden Age, still so prominent in modern museums, obscured many other, less glittering aspects from view. As in Roman literature, pastoral articulations of a re-actualized Golden Age paradoxically, and implicitly, functioned in a discourse of empire and power. If the new Beemster *polder* allowed the Amsterdam elites to taste the pleasures of Virgil's *Georgics*, Amsterdam, by the mid seventeenth century, resembled Virgil's Rome, hoarding the treasures of the world and commanding the seas. The city virgin that was so proudly displayed on Amsterdam's new Town Hall neatly exemplifies the connection between the pastoral and empire. Essentially a pastoral character (she also figured in Heemskerck's *Batavian Arcadia*) this composed, beautiful young girl, sitting atop Amsterdam's newly built centre of power, is shown receiving the rich spoils from all over the world as if nature itself wanted her in her idleness to receive it. She is the ultimate symbol uniting the seemingly irreconcilable states of leisurely innocence and world dominance. We can see how such appropriations of the pastoral Golden Age quite purposefully hide the less appealing aspects of the readily available tropes: the fierce power struggles both inside and outside the Republic; the violent colonial enterprise that brought about the slave trade and the human suffering

required to sustain prosperity in the neat Dutch cities is conveniently replaced by a deserving personification of purity.

At the same time, the literature and the art of the seventeenth century that helped to create the image of a golden age for future generations also breathe a deep awareness of the fragility of human endeavour and power. Indeed, as in classical literature, the very idea of a Golden Age was wound up inextricably with its own demise. Nicolas Poussin, one of the great French painters of the period, most memorably depicted this ambiguity when he painted a tomb in a pastoral landscape with the inscription '*et in arcadia ego*': even in a Golden Age, there was no escape from death or decay, and even in a pastoral environment war might eventually penetrate. This awareness of the frailty of peace, and the need to protect the vulnerable country, was fed continuously in the Dutch Republic by the trope of the 'Garden of Holland', another common image in the art of the period that alluded to the Golden Age by presenting the province of Holland or the Republic as a whole as an enclosed garden, which needed to be fiercely guarded by a vigilant protector (usually the Dutch stadholder) against a dangerous and hostile outside world.⁹ Needless to say, such representations of the Dutch Republic as an enclosed, peaceful space, as a victim of foreign aggression and as dependent on a male descendant of William of Orange were just as ideologically charged as Vondel's poem on the Beemster. The iconic power of such images has proven very difficult to combat.

The Rise of the United Provinces

Behind the Dutch Golden Age's glittering mystique lies a complex and troubled past. Indeed, few would have predicted the emergence of a thriving Dutch Republic in the northern Low Countries in the sixteenth century. Strategically located between France, England and the Holy Roman Empire, the Netherlandish provinces had long been a key possession of the Spanish-Habsburg dynasty in northern Europe. Local opposition against monarchical rule and religious divisions caused by the Protestant Reformation, however, triggered an outbreak of violence and rebellion in the 1560s. This messy Dutch Revolt would continue for several decades, eventually splitting the area into north and south. The seven northern provinces, among them Holland, developed into

an independent, predominantly Protestant state known at the time as the United Provinces (see Map 1). The southern provinces, including the larger parts of Flanders and Brabant, remained under Spanish-Habsburg rule.

The creation of the United Provinces, then, was largely unforeseen and accidental. Nor was this new polity planned to be a republic. The Act of Abjuration of 1581, in which the rebel States General had deposed their Habsburg prince (Philip II of Spain), was initially intended to offer sovereign powers to the French or English crown. Only when these attempts failed did the rebels decide to leave the post of sovereign vacant for the time being, thus creating a new, republican federation. Political theories that underpinned Dutch republicanism were formulated after the fact, and full-swing republicanism never found wide support. The devotion to the House of Orange – the descendants of rebel leader William of Orange – is only one indication of many that popular culture remained as deeply affected by the magic of monarchism as it did elsewhere in Europe.¹⁰ The Dutch Republic's religious identity was similarly ambiguous. Officially a Protestant, Calvinist state, the United Provinces became a multi-confessional society that included a sizeable Catholic minority and, in some areas, Jewish communities.

If the Dutch Republic was an accidental creation, its rise to wealth and power, meteoric as it was, was also a highly contingent development and was under continuous threat from within as well as from without. From the 1580s, large-scale waves of immigration from the southern provinces confronted the rebel provinces, greatly bolstering their economy. Trading interests and the military conflict against Habsburg Spain encouraged the Dutch to attack Iberian possessions in Asia and the Americas and to forge a global maritime empire of their own. Sophisticated urban industries in Holland and a highly productive agricultural sector added to economic progress. Thanks to foreign and domestic immigration, the population of Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, and many other towns was booming. A growing class of prosperous urban citizens thus fuelled and transformed the market, not least that of luxury products such as painting, decorative arts, and books.

When the Dutch concluded a temporary peace agreement with Habsburg Spain in 1609, the United Provinces had established themselves as a leading commercial power in Europe, with growing interests

in Asia and the Atlantic world. War continued after 1621, and it was only in 1648 that the king of Spain formally recognized the independent Dutch state at the peace conference of Westphalia. As had happened during the temporary accord of 1609–21 (the Twelve Years' Truce), the treaty of 1648 triggered domestic political conflicts. Discussions within the public, Reformed Church added to these tensions. Having grown out of military conflict, the United Provinces clearly found it difficult to cope with peace. Partly for this reason, but mainly to defend its advantageous trade position, the Dutch were soon embroiled in new armed struggles – with England, Sweden, and France – which occupied Europe in the second half of the century.

Owing to its ambiguous origins, the Dutch political system remained a peculiar mix of former Habsburg institutions that were adapted to new, republican practices. The stadholder, for example, had been a royal governor in one or more of the Netherlandish provinces under Philip II. After the revolt, he became a civil servant of the States (which regarded themselves as the new sovereigns) but also developed into a quasi-monarchical figure. As a rule, only descendants and relatives of rebel leader William of Orange were called to the prestigious office. The political and military ambitions of the princes of Orange regularly clashed with those of mercantile urban elites, notably those of Holland. Providing more than 50 per cent of all tax revenues, the province of Holland also supplied many of the Republic's great statesmen, such as Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Johan de Witt. It is perhaps typical that both men were executed after domestic conflicts that involved the Orange dynasty. The United Provinces were not quite as united and peaceful as their name and reputation suggests.

Barely a century after its emergence, the Dutch Republic almost came to an end. In 1672 a mixture of economic rivalry, religious tensions, and diplomatic agitations led to a joint military attack by France, England, and the bishoprics of Cologne and Münster. The United Provinces miraculously survived the invasion, but their economy was hit severely, and the following decades were marked by continuing armed conflicts with Louis XIV's France. While the financial burdens of war grew, the Republic's maritime rivals gradually overtook the Dutch dominance in shipping and trading. Soon after the Glorious Revolution (1689) transformed Stadholder William III of Orange into king of England, the glory of the United Provinces faded. William now commanded a formidable alliance, and the Dutch military was still one of the strongest in Europe.

In 1713, when the peace of Utrecht formally ended an era of almost forty years of war with France, the Dutch could still cheer that they and their allies had contained Louis XIV's France. But they had punched above their weight, and the economy was exhausted. The Golden Age was definitively over.

Historians and the Dutch Golden Age

We live and think by the terms we use, and therefore it may not be altogether surprising that the historiography of the Dutch Golden Age in some ways reflects the mythology of the golden age invoked by seventeenth-century artists. Firstly, it has long perpetuated the myth that this Golden Age was, quite simply, Dutch, rooted in the clay celebrated in Vondel's Dutch verses. The great cultural historian Johan Huizinga argued that the 'Dutch were the exception, not the rule'.¹¹ As a result, the Dutch Republic has frequently been viewed as the 'Garden of Holland': an enclosed space of bourgeois exception surrounded by aggressive monarchs. Recent historians have been more sensitive to the perils of trying to understand the Dutch Republic in isolation,¹² not only because the Dutch economic and military successes were highly dependent on the ill fortune and civil wars of their rivals, but also because many of those who contributed to its material wealth, military might, and cultural vitality were actually immigrants. Recognizing that Dutch prosperity, strength, and creative energy were highly dependent on foreign imports and international networks, recent research tends to view the Dutch Republic not as the exception of Europe, but as its product.

It has also proven difficult to escape from the narrative of the fall inherent in the Golden Age myth. In prominent accounts of the Dutch Republic the eighteenth century is still the iron age to the golden seventeenth. Here too, a broader, international perspective helps to nuance the classical figure. It is highly questionable, after all, whether it was the Dutch Republic that changed, or the world outside it. Many of the characteristics that historians have mentioned as pre-conditions for the Dutch Golden Age were still in place in the eighteenth century. The end of the Golden Age, one might well argue, was the rise of Britain and France, not the fall of the Dutch. Those new imperial powers lured Dutch investors as well as Dutch artists to foreign capitals. That,

however, did not make those artists any less Dutch than Spinoza Portuguese. In the end, any golden age is the result of international mobilities that defy essentializing national appropriation, as the movement of power, capital, and creative energy depends on the actual movement of people who are not easily categorized.

Finally, and most harmfully, there has long been a tendency to disconnect the history of Dutch imperialism and colonialism from the history of the Dutch Golden Age. The global dimension of the Dutch Republic is usually discussed in separate books, journals, or occasionally a separate chapter. This is a choice with great ideological implications: to disconnect such subjects from the history of the Dutch Republic proper is to reproduce the fantasy figure depicted on the pediment of Amsterdam Town Hall: it allows the mental compartmentalization of the less appealing sides of the Golden Age that are in fact inextricably connected to the positive tropes usually associated to it.

Unlike early modern observers, this book cannot claim that the Dutch Republic's ascent to prominence was the providential destiny of God's chosen nation. Unlike past generations of scholars, it follows recent historians in rejecting the idea that the Dutch Republic was an exception in Europe, which was able to prosper because somehow its condition, its people, and their mentalities were different from those of other states, and which was therefore best studied in isolation. Understanding the Dutch Golden Age means to appreciate its remarkability while acknowledging its darker sides, the incongruities in its culture, the contingencies in its development, and its dependence on and interactions with European and global developments.

Instead of providing a new, comprehensive narrative of rise and fall, this book seeks to emphasize the paradoxes and silences in the historiography of this central region in Europe. While providing traditional perspectives to readers unfamiliar with seventeenth-century Dutch history, we have chosen to present the Dutch Republic as comparable to other societies in Europe. Various chapters in this book deal with subjects that have *not* become iconic of the Dutch Golden Age, such as 'the cult of war and violence', 'classicism', and 'spiritual culture', but that are central to a full understanding of the period nevertheless. It also follows that the Dutch presence in Asia, Africa, and the Atlantic world constitutes an integral part of the book.

The seven parts of this volume reflect our aim to investigate the Dutch Republic from a cultural historical, less exceptionalist, and

more global perspective. Part I, 'Space and People', deals with the social and geographical structures that shaped Dutch society and which have been much researched in recent decades. Here, perhaps, Dutch exceptionalism is not entirely wrong: the Rhine and Meuse delta in which the Dutch state took shape was in many ways an exceptional part of Europe. Fortunately located, it offered protection from invasion, opportunities for traffic and trade, and rich agricultural soil. Unlike the landscape of the Ovidian Golden Age, however, it was also a labour-intensive landscape, which required constant human intervention and maintenance to become arable and prevent floodings. Part II, 'A State of War', investigates the all-important business of war, and asks how near-continuous warfare shaped Dutch society, politics, and mentalities. Part III, 'Political Culture', describes the complex functioning of the decentralized Dutch state, and the culture of debate at its heart. Deliberation, the prevalent political mode, brought with it many perils – as the Dutch were acutely aware – such as ungovernability or civil war. But when managed well, as the most talented politicians of the century could, it also had great advantages. 'Economy and Trade', Part IV, is not coincidentally the central part of the volume. Dealing both with the question of whether the Dutch Republic was indeed the first modern market economy and with the subject of global trade, it tackles some of the most-debated issues in past and current scholarship. Part V, on 'Religious Culture', perhaps best exemplifies our aim to provide a non-exceptionalist account: here the focus is not only on Dutch Calvinism and tolerance, the more exceptional aspects of Dutch religious culture, but also on religious pluralism and the spiritual culture which it shared with its neighbours. While painting, architecture, and publishing are present throughout the book, Part VI, 'Art and Literature', focuses on questions specific to cultural production, looking both at the specific genres that have so deeply affected our image of the Golden Age and at the particular markets for books and paintings. In Part VII, 'Realms of Knowledge', finally, we enter the realm of the mind. Often neglected in books on the Dutch Republic, its education, scholarship, and science were in fact foundational, for its international allure, for its maritime success, and for its societal development.

The mentalities of most of the Dutch Republic's inhabitants, the organization of its economy, its politics, and even its religion, we believe, were subject to largely the same kind of discussions and pressures found elsewhere. Instead of foregrounding distinctness, we have

therefore chosen to highlight the connections between Dutch culture and other cultures on which it depended and with which it stood in continuous and intensive contact. If the Dutch Republic developed into something quite extraordinary, this was not the result of innate difference, but rather of its manifold interactions and connections with other societies.

Notes

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3. Translated from J. van Vondel, 'P. Ovidius Nazoos Herscheppinge', in J. F. M. Sterck et al. (eds.), *De werken van Vondel. Zevende deel: Vertalingen uit het Latijn van Vergilius, Horatius en Ovidius*, Amsterdam, 1934, 408, ll. 131–137.
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Part I

Space and People

Urbanization

In the spring of 1673, Sir William Temple published his *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands*. The book was an attempt to explain to his English compatriots, who at the time were at war with the Dutch, the nature of their adversary. Temple knew what he was talking about, having served for two years as Charles II's ambassador in The Hague – and it showed. Temple's *Observations* are probably the best contemporary analysis of Dutch society. In that analysis, towns loomed large. Their love of political freedom, enshrined in ancient customs and privileges, and hatred of religious persecution were identified by Temple as two of the most important explanations for the success of the Revolt that established the Dutch Republic as an independent country. In his discussion of the Dutch economy, he highlighted the role of urban commerce, and the complementarity of towns in terms of their local economic specialization. Commerce was also his main explanation for the particular form of military power in the Dutch Republic, pioneered, Temple explained, in Venice: a reliance on foreign mercenaries, paid for by the profits from trade. His description of the Republic's political system likewise emphasized the crucial role of the towns. The Dutch Republic, Temple correctly observed, was not so much a single country as a 'confederacy of seven sovereign provinces'. 'But', he continued, 'to discover the nature of their government from the first springs and motions, it must be taken yet into smaller pieces, by which it will appear that each of these provinces is likewise composed of many little states or cities, which have several marks of sovereign power within themselves, and are not subject to the sovereignty of their province'.¹ His chapter on Dutch politics therefore starts out with an analysis of Amsterdam's local political system, and the role of the city council and the city's burgomasters.

Temple's brilliantly successful portrait, in other words, depicted the Dutch Republic as a fundamentally urban society.

To a surprising degree, Temple's analysis is supported by modern historical scholarship. The aim of this chapter is to bring together elements of this scholarship to flesh out various dimensions of this feature of the Dutch Golden Age. It will be argued that the Golden Age should be appreciated as a direct result of the urban dimension of Dutch society in the seventeenth century.

An Urbanized Country

The Dutch Republic emerged in a region of Europe where urbanization had already reached remarkably high levels. By 1550, i.e. before the establishment of the Dutch Republic as an independent country, the Low Countries were the most urbanized region of Europe. Much of this urbanization, however, was concentrated in the south and especially in the county of Flanders and the Duchy of Brabant. Antwerp, in Brabant, had emerged in the preceding century as one of the largest cities of late medieval Europe, but Bruges, Ghent, and Brussels were equally substantial by the standards of the era. This also points to a specific feature of urbanization in these parts: rather than finding most of the urban population concentrated in one or two mega-cities, such as Paris or London, the Low Countries were a region of substantial towns. With its urban population scattered across a large number of urban centres, the Low Countries resembled Italy and southern Germany rather than France or England.²

The Dutch Revolt did not change these overall features of urbanization in the Low Countries, but it did shift the emphasis from the south to the north. By 1600 the percentage of urbanites in the north had overtaken that of the south. The first and most important reason was straightforward: possibly as many as 100,000 people, mostly from urban environments, had exchanged the south for the north. The populations of towns such as Haarlem and Leiden now consisted of possibly 50 per cent immigrants from Brabant and Flanders. While the latter areas suffered, Holland's towns blossomed. On top of this flow of refugees, Holland's towns by 1600 were attracting immigrants from other countries as well, including Jews from Spain and Portugal during the 1590s, Germans during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), and an estimated 35,000 French Protestants who settled in the Dutch Republic after

Protestantism was outlawed in France in 1685. In the long run, however, the routine influx of migrants proved much more substantial. And even the refugees might have preferred other destinations, if it had not been for the economic opportunities offered by the Golden Age. Precisely for this reason, Holland's towns were by far the most attractive destinations, especially for migrants who planned to settle permanently. As shown in Chapter 3 of this volume, economic prosperity therefore acted as both a cause and a consequence of immigration.

Even though towns were important in most parts of the Dutch Republic, their growth and high levels of urbanization were primarily phenomena of the western areas, and particularly the county of Holland. By 1700, two-thirds of Holland's population was reckoned to live in towns, while the national average for the Dutch Republic was one-third. This latter figure was already very high by European and indeed world standards, but Holland's urbanization was truly exceptional. The urban population in Holland was distributed over a dozen medium-sized towns, but with their combined populations in the order of half a million in 1650 these added up to more than London (400,000) or Paris (430,000), the largest European cities at the time.³ Their economies were in many respects complementary, and political co-ordination was achieved in the States of Holland, where eighteen towns were represented and entitled to vote, next to the single vote of the province's nobility representing the countryside. The integration of Holland's towns received a further boost from the construction of special waterways on which regular tow-boat services operated, offering comfortable and reliable passenger transport between towns. All this set Holland apart from the rest of the country, which resembled much more the patterns normal in the rest of Europe at the time. The pattern of urbanization suggests that the Golden Age was concentrated in Holland, and this is borne out by other dimensions discussed later in this book, such as global trade and the mass production of paintings. These were not entirely missing in other regions, but took on a much less spectacular form.

An Urban Society

The impact of the towns was visible everywhere. For a start, the Dutch economy relied to an unusual degree on trade and industry. Economic historians are producing increasingly reliable estimates of economic

activities for the pre-statistical era, and Holland and England are among the best-researched regions. We can therefore say now with a reasonable degree of confidence that trade and industry comprised well over 80 per cent of Holland's economy in the seventeenth century. This is not to say that Dutch agriculture was backward or otherwise insignificant. On the contrary, due to the high levels of urbanization, farming itself had gone through a process of commercialization and specialization that made it one of the most productive in the world, bar the rice economies of East Asia. One of the new products introduced in the seventeenth century was tulips. Today the Netherlands remain the dominant producer of flowers, with as much as 50 per cent of the world market. Tulips demonstrate another feature of the Golden Age economy: the strong linkages between sectors. The success of tulips as a novelty luxury encouraged the producers of Delftware (or Dutch porcelain) to design special vases that presented the flowers in the most favourable manner. Delftware as such was in turn the result of a temporary interruption of the flow of Chinese porcelain to Europe, due to the Ming-Qing transition in the middle of the seventeenth century. The sudden halt in imports persuaded local producers in Delft to develop their own imitation of the coveted Chinese product. Delftware continued to serve a niche market even when the Chinese original started to become available again from the 1680s.

Both trade and industry, concentrated in the towns, were experiencing inter-connected changes. These had a lot to do with the steep rise in international and especially inter-continental trade. In the 1590s, the first successful trips to East Asia had been launched from various ports in Holland and Zeeland. These activities merged into the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1602. In 1621 a West India Company (WIC) was launched, mainly active in North America and Brazil, but later concentrating its activities in the Caribbean. Imports were processed in Holland; think of the sugar industry, unknown in the Netherlands before, or the production of various dyes, made for example from Brazil wood. Trade in turn required ships, which were mass produced on shipyards along the Zaan river, north of Amsterdam, serviced by sawmills propelled by wind energy. Although the Zaan region technically remained a rural district, the population of its ten villages together reached 20,000 by 1622 and more than 25,000 by the end of the century.⁴ The villages in this area more generally took on urban features to a remarkable degree. They

built town halls and called their inhabitants 'citizens', a word normally reserved for proper towns.

The importance of towns and cities was also reflected in the social composition and prestige of the various classes in society, and especially at the top. Holland had a nobility, but it was small and untitled, and therefore relatively marginal by international standards. The handful of noble families had a political influence far more significant than their numbers might suggest. However, the real power-brokers, economically and financially, but also culturally and socially, were the so-called regent families, who had grown rich in trade and industry and combined this with a place on one or another town council. Because of the peculiarities of the Dutch state structure, a total of fifty-seven towns had voting rights in the various provincial States assemblies and therefore indirectly in the States General. As a result, the town council of Zwolle, for example, one of three enfranchised towns in Overijssel, discussed peace treaties concluded by the Dutch Republic in 1629, 1648, 1667, and 1697, and more in the eighteenth century.⁵ The members of the town councils therefore had some justification in seeing themselves as the lords of the country. They were collectively known as 'regents'. In the early seventeenth century they usually combined their political and administrative positions with business, but as the century progressed more and more of them took university degrees, usually in law, and lived off their capital investments. They became full-time administrators, often combining their position on the town council with various other board positions in welfare and other institutions. The regents were usually the most prestigious local families. Hard on their heels were the merchants and entrepreneurs, who lived in the same streets and married into regent families. This upper crust grew increasingly rich during the seventeenth century. Family relations between them and the middle class of shopkeepers and artisans were unusual, and extensions of the city walls and the urban space also created a spatial separation between the residential areas of the super-rich and the middle class.

While the Golden Age helped to swell the ranks (and bank accounts) of the rich, it especially increased the numbers of the working classes and the poor, two categories that were in any case difficult to distinguish because the former lived very close to the poverty line, and could be pushed into the ranks of the indigent very easily. Probably the majority of these people would expect to become dependent on poor relief during at least some time in their lives, due to seasonal fluctuations in the

labour market, illness, or simply the family life cycle.⁶ In Alkmaar, a town of 13,000–14,000 inhabitants, north of Amsterdam for which we have good data, inequality increased between 1560 and the middle of the seventeenth century, but Alkmaar had an unusually equal distribution in the sixteenth century. Other towns in Holland also became more unequal during the Golden Age, but the increase was less marked than in Alkmaar.

Urban Institutions

Urban institutions shaped the Dutch Republic on all levels of its society. The country as a whole was dominated by the province of Holland, which paid almost 60 per cent of the Union's revenue and shouldered over 90 per cent of its debts. The States of Holland, in turn, were dominated by the eighteen enfranchised towns, for which the single vote of the nobility offered precious little balance. In five other provinces the votes of the towns and the nobility were in balance, although the peculiarities of the situation in Zeeland actually put the towns there in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the Orange stadholders who were the main political force in the province. Only in Friesland was the combined single vote of the province's eleven enfranchised towns (each of which had fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, apart from Harlingen and the province's capital Leeuwarden) matched by three rural districts with a vote each in the provincial States assembly.⁷

Towns themselves were governed under two distinct models. In the coastal provinces, permanent councils with members serving for life administered local services and covered provincial and national politics. In practice, a lot of the day-to-day business was left to two or four burgomasters, who were elected for one or two years only, but returned after a short waiting period. In Amsterdam the burgomasters who were temporarily out of office still participated in an informal council of 'former burgomasters' who were in effect more powerful than the council. In the eastern provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland, all members of the council had to be elected every year, and they were also controlled by so-called common councils, representing the guilds, militias, neighbourhoods, or a combination thereof. The consent of the common council was necessary for a change in the local constitution, the introduction of new taxes, and similar issues. In the coastal towns,

representation was not written into the local constitutions, but was nonetheless very real. For example, much local legislation in Amsterdam during the seventeenth century was not only developed in response to petitions from citizen associations, like the guilds, but often even copied their text verbatim from those same petitions.⁸ We also know that a lot of informal talks and negotiations took place between town hall and civic organizations, not just in Amsterdam but everywhere.

For these purposes, the town government could call on a dense web of local associations. Many areas of urban life were covered by civic organizations – some voluntary, others compulsory; some of them accessible only to those inhabitants with formal citizenship rights, others to all inhabitants; some quite small, others with hundreds of members. Two of the best-known, most generally available, and largest in terms of membership were the guilds and civic militias. The guilds were responsible for the organization of many, but by no means all, domains of economic life. The most notable exception was trade, which in Holland was largely unregulated (the only regulated aspect of trade was retailing, with many towns having shopkeepers' guilds).⁹ Joining a guild was compulsory for those who wanted to exercise the trade as an independent master; journeymen were not normally accepted as members. To join a guild, it was necessary to acquire formal citizen status in one's town of residence. Contrary to the popular image, most guilds made little effort to restrict entrance of new members, provided they were males; women found it difficult, often impossible, to enter the guild trades. Holland's guilds normally did not discriminate on religious grounds. The number of guilds increased very significantly during the seventeenth century, suggesting that at least they did not prevent economic prosperity. In the creative industries, we actually see a close coincidence between the blossoming of the arts and the multiplication of guilds.¹⁰ Members of guilds maintained social insurance for fellow members and held annual dinners. In Utrecht and Dordrecht they could even be buried together in the guild grave.

Civic militias had long been organized along the lines of the guild model, but were transformed during the Dutch Revolt into much more open organizations with compulsory membership, irrespective of formal citizen status, of adult men. Their task was to help defend the town in times of emergency and participate in the night watch about once a month. The militias in the towns of Holland commissioned collective portraits, in which the officers of the company had themselves

portrayed for posterity. These pictures were displayed in the militia halls. The most famous was, of course, *The Night Watch*, Rembrandt's 1642 portrait of the company of Frans Banning Cocq.¹¹

Some towns had very active neighbourhood organizations. In Haarlem, informal neighbourhoods, usually comprising one or two streets, held dinners every couple of years where the accumulated funds were spent, but also participated in lotteries and discussed issues of common concern. They had no place in Haarlem's constitution but could be a channel for the authorities to communicate with the town's inhabitants – and to regulate their behaviour.¹²

All towns had welfare organizations which were usually administered by middle-class men and women. The most important of these institutions provided money, food, and clothes, and in winter also fuel, to the local poor. In Holland the poor were usually allowed to stay in their own homes. Workhouses, as they existed in Alkmaar, Amsterdam, Delft, Haarlem, Leiden, Leeuwarden, and Groningen, actually housed only small numbers of people and served mainly as a deterrent against begging. Dutch welfare had a reputation of being generous, but for most pauper households it was insufficient to survive. The poor still had to work or find other ways to make ends meet. Remarkably, much of the funding for poor relief was also provided by ordinary people who donated small amounts of money during street collections or by leaving a penny in one of the many poor boxes. Church welfare was, of course, entirely funded by parishioners. Other welfare institutions might be funded with tax money. The Amsterdam civic orphanage, for example, had a stake in the acceptance of new citizens in the city; part of their dues went to the orphanage. The same institutions also exploited the local theatre, and all profits deriving from civic entertainment were divided between them. In various kinds of ways, therefore, urban citizens were active agents shaping the life of their community – and their own lives as well.

An Urban Culture

The growth of Holland's towns created a huge demand for housing. Many of them had to expand their ramparts to accommodate the influx of immigrants. Completely new neighbourhoods were built as a result. The most famous was created in Amsterdam. After an initially small expansion in the 1590s, the Amsterdam council decided

to increase the size of the town substantially in 1609, while another, equally ambitious expansion was built during the 1660s. This expansion required, first of all, the demolition of the ramparts and the building of new defence works in fields to the west and south of the medieval city. In the process, the shanty town that had been built there in previous years was demolished. Speculators, in the meantime, made fortunes from buying up land ahead of the publication of the plans; these included quite a few members of the town council who had been aware of the plans from their initial stages. In other respects as well, the process of designing and executing the project was largely left to the market, simply because the local government lacked the financial and bureaucratic resources to execute a project of this magnitude.

The end result nonetheless looked remarkably well planned. The new area consisted broadly of two zones. The inner ring, closest to Dam Square that was the heart of the old city, consisted of four wide canals where no industries were permitted to settle and houses had to be built to a fairly generous minimum size. These canals were specifically designed to attract the well-off, for whom the housing shortage had become particularly galling, according to the merchant elite members on the council. The outer ring, on the other hand, constructed along a set of much narrower canals, and criss-crossed by alleys and inner courtyards, was to be the settlement for artisans and the working classes. By mid century Amsterdam had once more outgrown its housing capacity and the ring of canals was extended to the east, to embrace all of the old city, with another zone of industry and working-class housing attached to it. Unfortunately, this happened precisely when immigration started to slow down and some of the area remained vacant until another growth spurt started in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³

Amsterdam was not alone in expanding its territory. Leiden, which became one of Europe's most significant textile centres mainly due to a massive influx of immigrants from the Southern Netherlands, almost doubled in size as a result of additional industrial districts built to the north and east of the old city. As in Amsterdam, these new areas incorporated some luxurious canals, but in Leiden the proportion of working-class housing was much larger. Other towns that were substantially expanded in the first half of the seventeenth century included Alkmaar, The Hague (technically not a town, because it lacked an urban charter), Dordrecht,

Medemblik, Monnickendam, Rotterdam, and outside Holland also Groningen, Vlissingen (Flushing), and Zwolle.

The expansion of urban housing provided a massive boost to the local building industries. Between roughly 1580 and 1630 the housing stock in Holland almost trebled. Most of the new houses were designed and built by carpenters and stone-masons. Even along the Rapenburg, Leiden's most prestigious canal and home to many professors connected to the local university as well as the richest and most influential families on the town council, the most prolific designer of houses that were constructed around the middle of the century was the entrepreneurial stone-mason Willem Wijmoth. Wijmoth was not an architect *strictu sensu*, and his designs never made it into the histories of architecture. Houses became more sophisticated, with separate rooms for designated activities, such as cooking, sleeping, reception, and work. This process had started before 1600 but accelerated due to the extensive building activities. A major improvement of the late seventeenth century was the introduction of the sash window, developed simultaneously in Holland and England. The sash window allowed significantly more outside light to enter the house than previous designs.

Although some private housing was designed by architects, much of the demand for their work came from the public sector. Expanding towns required new gate buildings and other facilities. During the seventeenth century, nine towns built a completely new town hall, while seven others executed major renovations and rebuilding. Pieter Post was the most successful architect for public buildings. His designs included a new town hall for Maastricht, after that city had been conquered by the Dutch in 1632, churches in Haarlem and Middelburg, weighing houses in Leiden and Gouda, and town gates in Leiden and Utrecht; he oversaw major refurbishments of still others.¹⁴ The biggest prize, however, went to Post's former mentor, Jacob van Campen, who got the commission to design a new town hall for Amsterdam. It was to be the largest public building erected in seventeenth-century Europe.

There was a sense of justice in this outcome because Van Campen had been the main force behind the development of a style that would later be called Dutch classicism. This emerged from a theoretical reading of Italian classical authors, Vitruvius above all, and privileged harmonious proportions over the sort of embellishments that a previous generation had preferred. The Amsterdam Town Hall was deliberately planned as a celebration of the town's success. In a poem by Amsterdam's poet

laureate Joost van den Vondel, commissioned for the opening of the unfinished building in 1655, it was hailed as the eighth wonder of the world, a fitting monument for a place that could claim to be in the same league as Venice and Rome as one of history's great cities, but also as the seat – like Venice and ancient Rome – of a citizens' government and as such contrasted by Vondel with royalty.¹⁵ It was, obviously, no coincidence that the great hall of the new building was called 'citizens' hall'.

Amsterdam Town Hall was a tourist attraction and became the subject of numerous paintings, clearly made for the building's admirers. These paintings in themselves were the result of another significant cultural innovation. The single most popular pictorial genre in the Dutch Republic was landscape. These paintings were initially so unique that the English word is a direct descendant of the Dutch '*landschap*'. Most landscapes were painted quickly and therefore cheap, created with a limited palette. Expensive versions sometimes celebrated Italian scenery, but many landscapes were more or less faithful renditions of the Dutch outdoors. During the seventeenth century, a variety emerged that had towns rather than nature as its subject matter. Some of these townscapes looked at an urban setting from afar, as if they were an element in the natural environment of the landscape. At the time, possibly the best-known example was Jacob van Ruysdael's *View of Haarlem* (Figure 1.1), with Haarlem's renowned linen-bleaching industry depicted in the foreground. Dozens of copies, all made by the same studio, have survived, testifying to its popularity. Ruysdael was part of a small but significant element of the Dutch art market, celebrating towns as its special subject. Like landscapes, townscapes – the term was introduced only around 1800 – had emerged from the background into pictorial subjects in their own right. They came in a variety of sub-categories, including the elevated view that Ruysdael used, the street-level view as in Vermeer's *Little Street of Delft*, or the same artist's larger perspective on Delft from the exterior, portraits of specific buildings, perhaps most famously in Jan van der Heyden and Gerrit Berckheyde's series of paintings of Amsterdam's new Town Hall in the 1660s and 1670s.¹⁶

A third cultural area where urbanization had a significant impact was publishing and literacy. In the early modern period, literacy rates were mainly determined by two factors: Protestantism and the percentage of urbanites in the population. Protestantism encouraged its believers to personally familiarize themselves with the holy message by reading the Bible. The most significant publishing project in the



Figure 1.1 Jacob van Ruysdael, *View of Haarlem*, 1650s.

young Dutch Republic was the official translation into Dutch of the Bible, commissioned by the Synod of Dordt in 1618. It was important first of all because it happened at a time when the Dutch language as such was still unsettled. It was trying to distinguish itself from the Low German from which it originated and, frankly, had been all but indistinguishable in the sixteenth century. Now, literary authors and the committee producing the new Bible translation were simultaneously working out the grammar and vocabulary of the newly established nation of the 'Batavians'. It took the committee almost twenty years to finish the project, but the result became the single most important text

of the Dutch Republic. Any family owning books would at the least own a Bible, and those adhering to the Dutch Reformed Church (about half the population) would read from it on a daily basis. Many families used their copy of the States Bible, as it was called, to record births and deaths; the copy would be passed on from one generation to the next.

Literacy rates were high in towns, because that is where educational facilities – public schools, private schoolmasters, guild apprenticeships – were concentrated. In Amsterdam, by the end of the seventeenth century, over half of adult females and three-quarters of men were able to write at least their own name, suggesting that, even if their writing abilities may have been limited, they must have had elementary reading skills. Significantly, such skills were much greater among locals than among immigrants, suggesting the former had benefited from the opportunities that were locally available.

Another indication of the high literacy rates was the rapid rise of the publishing industry in the Dutch Republic generally, but especially in the towns of Holland where most publishers were concentrated. In the sixteenth century, Deventer had been one of the few towns in the Northern Netherlands with a publishing tradition of some significance, due to the activities of the Brethren of the Common Life in this town. Only a handful of other northern towns boasted a bookshop-cum-publisher. Otherwise, Low Countries publishing was concentrated in the south, especially Antwerp. As in so many other areas, the Revolt and the Fall of Antwerp were to prove a turning point. By 1610 the number of Dutch towns with a bookshop had tripled to twenty-four, and the number of publishers in the Dutch Republic had easily passed the one hundred mark. Much of their output was published in Dutch, for the domestic market. During the seventeenth century, Dutch publishers together published an estimated 100,000 titles. During the second half of the century, increasing numbers of those titles were also exported. The arrival of many Huguenot publishers in 1685 in particular boosted those exports.

Among the many innovations developed by Dutch urban publishers was the newspaper. The first newspapers appeared in the German lands, as the printed successors to merchants' newsletters about foreign developments that might impact on trade. By the middle of the century, Amsterdam had become the news capital of the world, while other towns of Holland were not far behind. News bulletins, mostly of a single sheet, were published in Dutch, French, and English. The business developed to such an extent that some

publishers could afford to specialize entirely in the production of newspapers.¹⁷

Overseas Urbanization

When it came to urbanization, Dutch colonizers entered very different types of societies. In what would be known as North America, as well as in Africa, towns as they existed in Europe were more or less absent. Asia, on the other hand, had a long and successful urban history before the arrival of the Europeans.¹⁸ Chinese cities in particular were probably larger than any in Europe. Urban populations for the Indonesian archipelago are in doubt, and it is therefore not so easy to establish what it was that Portuguese and Dutch merchants found on arrival. It has been claimed that the region was among the most urbanized at the time, but more sceptical voices claim the exact opposite. Likewise, population figures for individual towns fluctuate wildly.¹⁹

As far as the Dutch were concerned, in most places they resided in or near existing settlements. Banten, for example, was a capital city in West Java with a population of possibly 12,000–15,000, where the Dutch East India Company erected a fort on the outskirts in 1685, after taking control of Banten's foreign trade. For its own headquarters, the VOC decided in 1619 to create a city more or less from scratch. In 1619 they captured the town of Jayakarta, or Jacatra, on the eastern border of Banten in the estuary of the Ciliwung River, razed it to the ground, and built an entirely new settlement. The governor-general of the Company and initiator of the project, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, had wanted to call the town New Hoorn, after his home town in the north of Holland. However, the Board of Directors insisted on a name with more general appeal and hence it became Batavia, after the Germanic tribe that were supposed to be the ancestors of the Dutch.

Batavia was built primarily as a fortified warehouse. Its population consisted of Dutch and other European immigrants, some 3,500 a decade after the new city was launched. The other half of the approximately 8,000 inhabitants were Asian Christians, people of Chinese extraction, and increasingly also slaves imported from the Indian subcontinent. Many of these settlers were males, who married Indonesian women and produced mixed-race offspring who came to dominate the town's society and culture. Interestingly, throughout the seventeenth century Portuguese was the shared language of Batavia's inhabitants. By the

early eighteenth century the city had grown to perhaps 100,000 inhabitants, 15,000 of whom lived inside the walls. The others were often soldiers, recruited in the archipelago to help the VOC's military operations, but also slaves working for the Company. The latter by now made up as much as half the town's population. Batavia had many of the civic institutions found in Dutch towns, including citizenship, hospitals, orphanages, and poor relief. One thing that was missing, however, was economic freedom, as the VOC closely regulated and monitored trade.²⁰

Beneath this skin of normal civic life ran a dark vein of anxiety and violence. This was only partly due to the overwhelming natural environment that Europeans were exposed to in the tropics. Still, on average a tiger was killed outside the walls of Batavia once a month. However, the real danger was other human beings. Around Batavia, groups of what we would now call guerrillas were active, and in revenge the Europeans sent out hunting parties to catch them. In 1632, prize money was promised for living (50 reals) and dead (25) fighters. In the early years, Batavia was at war with the neighbouring states of Banten and Mataram – but even more with itself. Extreme inequality and the diversity of its population created tensions that could easily erupt into domestic violence. Masters routinely flogged their slaves, husbands beat up their wives. In both circumstances, inequality was exacerbated by cultural cleavages: the slave masters were Europeans, their slaves came from India; European men had married (or were living with) Indonesian women.²¹

Savage cruelty was likewise in evidence among the European settlers of the New World. Of the Dutch settlements, only New Amsterdam had urban features, however. Its population reached 2,500 before the English took over in 1664, and renamed it New York. Compared to Batavia, that population was much more straightforward. First of all, the Europeans were a majority, and secondly there were no family relationships with the natives. In fact, no natives lived in New Amsterdam itself. Its non-European population consisted of a small group of slaves, all of African origin. As a result, aggression was directed primarily towards the outside world, where the Europeans, at one and the same time, felt vastly superior to the Indian tribes of the area and lived in permanent fear of them. To make things more complicated, the various Indian tribes in the area held grudges against each other, while the Europeans too were competing for beaver furs and territory: the English were making headway from the east, while the French were

closing in from the north. Relations were not always tense, but did erupt into full-scale warfare in the 1640s, when New Amsterdam's governor Willem Kieft deliberately sought a confrontation in which dozens of settlers and thousands of Indians lost their lives. The conflict escalated when the Europeans started to kill not just their warrior opponents, but also their wives and children, violating the basic rules of engagement of Indian warfare. The wall that was built along the northern perimeter of the previously unprotected New Amsterdam would give way, after its demolition in 1699, to what is nowadays perhaps the most famous street in the world, i.e. Wall Street.²²

Conclusion

The Dutch Republic was the most urbanized society of the seventeenth century, in Europe but almost certainly anywhere in the world. This general observation needs to be qualified in two ways. Firstly, within the Dutch Republic the highest level of urbanization was reached in the county of Holland. It was no coincidence, of course, that most of the things that we associate with the Golden Age – economic prosperity, religious toleration, cultural blossoming – were also primarily features of Holland's society and less in evidence in the other parts of the country. Those other provinces depended in many ways – economically, militarily, culturally – on Holland's success, and only grudgingly accepted Holland's leadership. Secondly, intense urbanization was also achieved in other regions in Europe and around the globe; think of the Home Counties of south-east England, or the Yangzi delta region around Shanghai in China. The difference between Holland and those other regions was that, in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, Holland's prosperity was backed up by a powerful state. In that state the other six provinces, although they were not as dynamic as Holland, still had an important role to play, as suppliers of manpower for Holland's fleet and industries, and as a military buffer zone. In turn, towns in these other provinces benefited from the persistence of urban autonomy in Holland. Once Holland's towns, under pressure of massive public debt, started to shift their position towards state centralization in the wake of the French invasion of 1795, urban autonomy was doomed everywhere. During the seventeenth century, however, that autonomy had been a crucial ingredient of the Dutch Republic's Golden Age.

Notes

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Water and Land

The relationship between land and water in the Low Countries has always been more ambivalent than is generally recognized. On the one hand, and most obviously, defence against the sea has been a major theme in the history of the Netherlands from the earliest times – and continues to be up to the present. The task of controlling the abundant water inside the sea dykes has perhaps a less dramatic history but has remained an inescapable reality of Dutch life, in part because of the volume of water brought into the region by the Rhine and the other great rivers. Yet the relationship between water and land should not be seen simply as a struggle between the two elements; water may have been a potential enemy, but it also brought vital benefits for the inhabitants of the Northern Netherlands. In the seventeenth century in particular, Dutch economic success was intimately tied to the advantages provided not only by easy access to the sea, but also by the transport infrastructure facilitated by rivers and canals. This is not a story of land versus water, but of a precarious, and ever changing, balance between the two.

The sea may have been a major and continuing threat but it was also vital for the development of the Dutch economy in the Golden Age. By the late sixteenth century much of the land in the maritime provinces of the nascent Dutch Republic had been reclaimed or drained during the course of centuries and needed constant protection from the sea. Indeed, the land in the older *polders* (drained areas) had sunk considerably over time and so had become particularly vulnerable. Up to this point the struggle with the sea was as much defensive as offensive, and the floods of the early years of the sixteenth century seemed to suggest that the fight was being lost – or at least that success was far

from assured. This process of slow gains and sudden losses turned from the late sixteenth century onwards into a half-century of large-scale reclamation and drainage projects, such that by the middle of the seventeenth century the balance between land and water had been decisively and permanently altered in favour of the land. This success was not, however, without its difficulties and indeed drawbacks: the new *polders* narrowed the possibilities for transport by water to a certain extent, much to the detriment (at least as perceived by their governments) of some towns in Holland, for example. The inland fisheries also suffered from this major environmental change.

The Dutch economy, on the other hand, was first and foremost based on trade, and that trade depended on the sea, together with the canal and river routes which gave Dutch traders access to a large continental hinterland. One of the chief foundations of Dutch trading prosperity – the ‘mother trade’ – was the shipping, partly for consumption at home and partly for re-export, of grain from the Baltic ports. This was a bulk trade, requiring many ships and employing many seamen, and like the rest of Dutch commerce it was carried in Dutch ships manned, in the main, by Dutch sailors. Sea routes also gave access to western and Mediterranean Europe, and later to the spectacular but economically less important colonial trade to the East and the Americas. The North Sea was also a vital Dutch resource in a very specific sense: not only were herring and, to a much lesser extent, cod important sources of food for the Dutch people, but fishing for them also employed at its peak in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries something in the region of 500 boats and gave jobs to a commensurate number of fishermen. Cured herring also supplied a lucrative export commodity, packed in barrels and shipped along the inland waterways to various markets in western Europe.

Canals, rivers, and lakes provided the Northern Netherlands with a dense transport network which made communications in general and the movement of goods in particular relatively easy and efficient. Whereas in most of Europe poor or non-existent roads made travel and the transport of goods slow and expensive, almost the whole of the Republic was accessible by water in one way or another. Moreover, while the fact that much of the country was near or below sea level rendered it vulnerable to flooding, it certainly facilitated travel by water, though the numerous sluices needed to control inland water flows could be a hindrance. The advantages of easy

transport by water were most obvious in the case of goods, but passenger movement was also made easier, especially between the major towns. In addition to the relative ease of travel by boat throughout much of the Republic, in the course of a few decades from the 1630s onwards, a network of *trekvaarten* was constructed. These were dedicated canals for towed passenger barges, operating on regular schedules, and covering much of the country.¹ These became rapidly so much an accepted part of Dutch life that imagined arguments between passengers on such barges became a common trope of the pamphlet literature of the time.

The Transformation of the Landscape

During the brief period between the late sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth, a series of reclamation/drainage projects transformed the landscape of the maritime region, most notably in Holland and Zeeland. This process ran parallel with the great economic boom which took place in Holland, and to a lesser extent the Republic as a whole, in precisely this period. Abundant capital for investment together with favourable prices for agricultural products were the engines behind the drainage boom. From the late sixteenth century, for a number of economic and demographic reasons, prices for a wide variety of foodstuffs rose throughout Europe, providing a favourable market for Dutch dairy and beef farmers. This positive conjuncture encouraged investment in the agricultural sector and specifically in drainage projects. Amsterdam in particular seems to have been awash with capital looking for a safe and profitable outlet, and it has been calculated that between 1610 and 1630 some ten million guilders were poured by investors from this booming city into drainage schemes in north Holland alone.² By the 1640s, however, economic growth was faltering, agricultural prices began to stagnate, and reclamations tailed off; after this point the only significant increase in the area of reclaimed land was in west Zeeland-Flanders. Here it was indeed reclaimed land – much of the region had been lost to the sea by the 1590s as a direct result of the fighting around Sluis and Bruges during the war with Spain. Subsequently some land had been regained, especially during the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–21), but the recovery of the region as a whole had to wait until the war finally came to an end in 1648. Then

in little more than a decade the rest of the region was drained, with the finance coming largely from Zeeland's towns.³

The end result of this whole process was a dramatic increase in the area of farmland in the maritime region; in Holland alone it grew by almost a third. In north Holland the results were even more striking. In the sixteenth century this region was almost as much water as land, and the sea reached into the heart of the region. A large village like De Rijp in the centre of north Holland was well enough connected to the sea to act as the home port of a fleet of herring fishing boats. By the 1640s the region had been transformed into a solid landmass, with only a few small lakes, with these not directly connected to the sea. In sum, the balance in the province as a whole had shifted definitively in favour of land and had also stabilized: the contemporary landscape of Holland is essentially as it was around 1650. (The draining of the Haarlemmermeer in the nineteenth century is the major exception.) Less spectacular works in the coastal region of Friesland and Groningen, and around the estuaries in southern Holland and Zeeland, also played an important part in consolidating the supremacy of land over water. The sea could still be a threat, but in the main the dunes along the coast of Holland were now backed by a shorter and thus more defensible line of defences against the North Sea and the Zuiderzee. Inland, dykes, and sluices still needed to be maintained to control what was still a relatively water-rich environment; the waters flowing into the Republic from the Rhine, Meuse, and other rivers still needed to be contained and, eventually, drained into the North Sea. This task still fell to the long-established *waterschappen*: a network of regional boards with responsibility for maintaining dykes and sluices, and exemplifying the Dutch tradition of self-government at the local level. On the whole, though, the new *polders* not only transformed the proportion of land to water throughout the maritime region, but also made both the control of water internally and defence against the sea more effective.

Although the availability of capital to invest together with the lure of high agricultural prices made the drainage schemes both possible and desirable, they could not have succeeded as they did without vital technological changes. The older system of drainage – opening sluices at low tide and closing them at high – was no longer sufficient for the challenge presented by the new drainage schemes. The water had to be pumped out of the new *polders*, and it was windmills that supplied the power for these pumps. An important prerequisite was an improvement

in the design and operation of windmills; most importantly new gearing was introduced that enabled the crown of the mill to be rotated to catch the prevailing winds, whereas previously the whole of the mill had needed to be turned, a much more clumsy and laborious process. Even with the new mills, the depth of water that could be drained was still limited to about a metre. However, it was found that by linking a series of mills together – the *molengang* – a much greater depth of water could be tackled successfully. These technological and organizational improvements made it possible to drain the Beemster (3.5 metres deep) in 1612 and even the Wormer (4.5 metres deep) in 1624.⁴ It should be noted that these new *polders* were much further below sea level than had been possible before this period. These more efficient windmills were also used to improve the drainage of existing *polders* and to control water levels and flows more efficiently – and indeed to pump water out of the country and into the sea where necessary. The lines of small windmills to be seen on many Dutch landscape paintings of the seventeenth century are a reminder of how ubiquitous these pumping systems became in this period.

Although the seventeenth century was the great period for Dutch landscape painting and most of the artists specializing in the subject lived and worked in Holland – the province that experienced the most drastic changes – there is surprisingly little evidence in Dutch seventeenth-century landscapes of this transformation of the countryside. Of course, it was not the job of artists to document social and economic change, and perhaps these flat, almost featureless, newly drained *polders* were simply seen as unpromising subjects for art. Yet Dutch painters were adept at turning the mundane into art: flat stretches of countryside do appear in, for example, depictions of towns from a distance, and Meindert Hobbema was capable of turning an avenue of trees in flat countryside into art. However, the master of Dutch landscape, Jacob van Ruysdael, favoured more dramatic subjects than could be offered by the newly drained *polders*, and in general artists seem to have preferred a much less tidy countryside that allowed for the deployment of woods, farms, and dunes in picturesque combinations (see Figure 1.1). At a time of such rapid and far-reaching change, it is possible that painters were intent on capturing a reality that was disappearing before their eyes, rather than showing what was new in the countryside. Similarly, the reduction of the area covered by water was also not reflected in the art of the period; water continued to be almost



Figure 2.1 Jan Asselijn, *Breach of St Anthony's Dyke*, 1651.

ubiquitous in Dutch landscapes. River and harbour scenes, frozen rivers, and games on ice were all extremely popular subjects. It is notable that such scenes were essentially of tamed water, useful for pleasure as well as for transport; only a few examples depict rivers breaking their banks or dyke breaches (Figure 2.1). In contrast, the seascapes of the period revelled in the dramatic possibilities of storms at sea and ships in peril, as well as in the calmer maritime scenes of, for example, Jan van de Cappelle. Perhaps those who bought such paintings felt less threatened by the dangers of the sea than by the more immediate risk of flooding at home. Dutch landscape painting is essentially an expression of an urban culture with the countryside being regarded as a place of recreation rather than work. The Amsterdam elite had imposing villas along the river Vecht, but more common were more modest country retreats – cottages or just gardens. The market for art expressed an urban taste and favoured picturesque country scenes rather than the mundane reality of the new countryside that was being created outside the city walls – nor, perhaps, did it welcome reminders that it was not just the new *polders* that were below sea level.

These major changes in the ratio of land to water were largely confined to the maritime provinces, but the relationship of land to sea, rivers, and canals was of almost equal importance to the inland provinces. Indeed, to use this term in this particular context is more than somewhat misleading as the Zuiderzee – at this time still fully connected to the North Sea – reached into the heart of the Northern Netherlands, touching the coasts of Utrecht, Overijssel, and Gelderland. Its presence facilitated water-borne trade within the Northern Netherlands, as well as bringing overseas trade within the reach of these so-called inland provinces. North Brabant too had some indirect contact with the sea as it had a coastline bringing it into contact with the delta of the great rivers. Only the territory of Drenthe had no coastline at all. The routes across the Zuiderzee and further along the river IJssel connected the towns along that river – Kampen, Deventer, Zwolle, and Zutphen – with on the one hand the booming economy of Holland, and on the other an extensive hinterland in the Holy Roman Empire, while the Scheldt, Meuse, and Rhine linked the towns of the south Holland and Zeeland delta to markets beyond the borders of the Republic to the south and east. The sea and the rivers brought with them a certain vulnerability, though not in as acute a form as in the maritime region. There was a significant low-lying strip along the coasts of these provinces which also needed to be protected from incursions by the sea, and the rivers brought with them the danger of flooding in what was in general still a low-lying area by normal European, though not Dutch, standards. Nevertheless, the change in the relationship of land to water in these provinces was relatively small, partly at least because until the end of the Eighty Years' War the effects of continued warfare, together with economic stagnation at best, meant that there was little money or incentive to invest in such schemes. Whereas after the end of the sixteenth century there was very little actual fighting in Holland and Zeeland, the situation was very different in the inland provinces, and North Brabant in particular was on the front line for the whole of the war.

The change in the balance between land and water in the maritime provinces modified, but did not fundamentally alter, the structural role of water in the Dutch economy. Water, in the form of river, canal, or lake, was by far the most important mode of transport for people as well as goods. In the conditions obtaining in the seventeenth century, with few or no metalled roads, transport by land was slow and, for bulk goods,

exorbitantly costly. This was particularly true for the low-lying areas of the Northern Netherlands, where roads all too quickly turned into almost impassable mud. Oddly enough, some of the most usable routes ran along dykes where they were raised above the surrounding land (and water). In the maritime region of the Republic the difficulties of transport by land were more than compensated for by the relative ease of movement by water. Towns and villages were connected to each other and to the sea by a dense network of water-borne routes, which made possible the integration of the rural economy into the urban, and by extension with the wider European – and even world – market.

An Agricultural Revolution

The expansion of the area available for farming was, however, only a part – though an important part – of a longer-term transformation of the agricultural sector in the Northern Netherlands and was, indeed, to a large extent a consequence of this longer-term change. In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries agriculture, particularly in the maritime region, moved from being largely subsistence farming to production primarily for the market. Instead of trying to provide for all, or at least most, of their needs at home, farmers began to concentrate on ways of farming which best suited the nature of their land – and maximized profits. In Holland this meant in the main specializing in dairy farming – butter and cheese – and the fattening of beef cattle, imported notably from Denmark, for the market.⁵ This mode of farming was also less labour-intensive, thus freeing labour to move to find employment in the service sector in nearby villages, or to migrate to the towns. The latter were able to absorb this influx because of the more general growth of the urban economy in this period. Urban growth and prosperity were in turn stimulated by broader developments in Dutch international trade, in particular the growing dominance of the Dutch in the trade with the Baltic region in rye and other bread grains. The import of cheap Baltic grain allowed farmers to specialize in products that brought higher prices not only in the towns but also in lucrative markets abroad. Transport by water was vital to these developments: grain was a bulk cargo that was prohibitively expensive to move by land, but Dutch merchants could buy it in the Baltic ports, ship it to the Republic, and still make a decent profit on the Amsterdam market. From

Amsterdam the grain was distributed to the other towns in Holland and from there to those areas of the countryside which were no longer producing bread grains for their own consumption. Grain also became an important part of Amsterdam's Europe-wide trading system as it held something approaching a monopoly of Baltic grain and re-exported it to western and southern Europe. This lucrative trade was made possible by water transport: by sea from the Baltic ports to Amsterdam, and from there by sea, river, or canal to markets in the rest of the Republic and further afield.

In Zeeland the severe shortage of fresh water limited the number of cattle that could be supported, and here farmers concentrated on the production of wheat, largely for the domestic market.⁶ Many areas of the inland provinces also found it profitable to produce for the market through specialization, particularly those with efficient transport connections. For example, in the Over-Betuwe – a region of Gelderland between the Rhine and the Waal – farmers concentrated on growing wheat, barley, rye, and oats for the market, which chiefly meant selling their produce in Holland.⁷ In sharp contrast, Drenthe in the east was a relatively poor region and less well served by water transport. This relative isolation at least partly explains why, in contrast to much of the rest of the Republic, farming here was concerned more with minimizing the danger of catastrophic failure than with maximizing profit, and consequently tended to aim at reducing risk through mixed farming.⁸ Farmers grew rye, kept cattle and some horses, and grazed sheep, hoping in this way to ensure that failure in any one area would not lead to overall ruin.

The transformation of the rural economy through the intrusion and stimulus of the market and the increase in the farmed area brought with it structural changes to society in the villages and smaller towns, most notably in Holland. The market orientation of Dutch agriculture stimulated the development of quasi-urban activities and institutions in the larger villages, as farmers increasingly needed to buy in services that they had formerly provided for themselves. While the transport sector was perhaps the most obvious beneficiary of the increase in urban–rural trade, the service sector in general also grew, providing goods and various services to the surrounding farms. This expansion constituted a radical change to the rural social structure. The transformation of the Dutch countryside may have been driven by market forces but, without the ease of

transport by water, the extent of the change would have been considerably less marked. The Dutch Golden Age was founded on water – or, rather, water transport.

The changed rural landscape created by the drainage/reclamation schemes did not, in the event, weaken internal communications as much as traders and regents in some of the less influential towns had feared, despite the loss of so much open water. The new *polders* were, of necessity, surrounded by ring-dykes and, of course, the water pumped out of the *polders* had to be emptied into these dykes and eventually into the sea, so some routes by water had to be maintained and even improved. In addition, these projects were designed to make money for the investors, and so it was essential that the produce of the new farmland could reach urban markets as easily and cheaply as possible – and that meant transport by water. The draining and exploitation of the new *polders* were a part of the developing market economy of the Republic that was pulling the rural and urban sectors ever more closely together economically. The result seems to have been that communications by water, in Holland especially, were tightened rather than hampered by the changed conditions, and that even the smaller towns and villages became integrated even more closely to the trading economy of the country as a whole.

The Politics of Drainage and Reclamation

The transformation of the Dutch landscape brought political problems with it, especially in Holland where these changes were the most far-reaching. The eighteen towns represented in the States of Holland after the Dutch Revolt – before there had been only six – were economic rivals as much as political allies, and the changes brought by the new *polders* posed threats as well as opportunities. As was their usual practice, the towns fought fiercely to protect and promote their own economic interests. The extent of the new *polders* meant that many of the established routes by water, especially over open lakes and sea inlets, within the province disappeared into the newly drained land. In consequence every town had to try to ensure that its connections to other towns, to its rural hinterland, and to the sea were not damaged – or that such damage was minimized. To do so they had to monitor both the general planning for the drainage schemes and the details of their operation. Issues of

particular concern were the width and depth of the ring-dykes, the routes of the canals draining the pumped-out water to the sea, and the design of the locks and sluices along these routes. It was in the interests of some of the towns to make sure that the ring-dykes and routes to the sea could carry the largest inland boats, while others on the contrary wanted to protect existing routes by limiting the size of vessels that could travel on the new waterways. The size of ships and boats that could pass through the locks along these routes were causes for concern for similar reasons, and there were disputes, for example, over whether locks should allow the passage of ships with fixed masts, or be capped to prevent such vessels from passing through.

Such disputes became particularly acute in Holland above the river IJ, where the seven towns, i.e. those represented in the States of Holland, quarrelled fiercely among themselves over access to the sea, to rural hinterlands, and to the markets of Haarlem and, especially, Amsterdam. The economic dangers for the Zuiderzee ports were acute at this time, as they were in the process of losing much of their direct overseas trade to the ever more dominant Amsterdam. Hoorn clung on to the trade in timber from Norway and the Baltic, and Enkhuizen to the import of cattle from Denmark, but both were losing most of their other overseas trade to their powerful neighbour. The peculiar political configuration of the province made the resolution of such disputes a difficult and time-consuming process: theoretically each town had a veto over decisions of the States and, even though decision-making was more pragmatic in practice, it remained difficult to enforce resolutions that went against the perceived vital interests of voting towns.⁹ The persistent failures to resolve such disputes between the towns meant that the undertakers of the drainage projects had to try to reconcile as many competing interests as possible in order to be able to begin, never mind complete, their plans. At times violence threatened, with Hoorn proving particularly aggressive in its attempts to disrupt drainage projects which its regents saw as endangering their town's interests. In the summer of 1625 they twice sent fully armed companies of the town's militia to disrupt work on a new canal near Alkmaar associated with the draining of the Heerhugowaard,¹⁰ but under political and legal pressure they had to admit defeat. Elsewhere, locks were damaged and dykes breached, though in the end actual armed conflict was avoided.¹¹ The rapidity with which this enormous transformation of the landscape took place made such tensions especially acute in this region, but

throughout Holland disagreements between towns over the placement and size of locks and sluices and the routes of waterways were more or less constant during the great transformation, and could lead to violent confrontations. The 'discussion culture'¹² was not always successful in resolving differences, but in these cases at least violence does not seem to have involved loss of life.

The creation of the new *polders* may have created a new landscape in north Holland and elsewhere in the maritime region, but the work of the *waterschappen* remained essential to the control of water within the country and for protection against inroads from the sea. In the course of the seventeenth century, however, these bodies seem to have lost much of their independence as the largely unfettered influence of the towns in the period after the Dutch Revolt changed the balance of power within Holland. The boards running the *waterschappen* came increasingly under the influence of the most powerful nearby towns, and the appointment of their officials, the *dijkgrafen* and *heemraden*, effectively came into the hands of the town governments. Despite the growing prosperity and economic and social modernization of the countryside, the political impotence of the nobility – who were deemed to represent rural interests against those of the towns in the States of Holland – after the break with Spanish-Habsburg rule meant that the influence of the towns was greater than it had ever been. The result was that decisions over water-control measures in Holland were increasingly in the hands of urban regents; the positioning of locks and sluices, the maintenance and repair of dykes, and the control of water flows were decided in the interests of the towns, modified only by intense rivalry between them. The balance between town and country was less uneven in Zeeland, if only because of the political influence of the princes of Orange; the situation in Friesland, where the States were composed of the representatives of thirty rural districts (*grietenijen*) as well as of the eleven towns, was much less clear-cut. Overall, however, political power in the maritime provinces lay somewhere between the towns and the princes of Orange, with the countryside having little independent say. In the inland provinces the countryside was represented, if at all, by the nobility or rural notables, which did not always prove to be in the best interests of farmers and tenants. Throughout the new Dutch state the extent and nature of control over water, and the defence of land from it, was determined by towns and nobles, with the degree of influence varying from province to province. The new *polders* were the work of urban

entrepreneurs, shaped and controlled by the towns, which were primarily concerned with protecting their own interests.

Water as an Ally

There was another sense, however, in which water was the friend and ally of the nascent Dutch state. The defensive uses of water, first during the Dutch Revolt and then during the long war with Spain, were so important that it can be asserted with some confidence that without them the Dutch would never have achieved independence. The situation is less clear for the years after the peace of Münster (1648) with Spain but, while the water-line defence of Holland may not have been the only reason for Dutch survival in face of the French invasion of 1672, it was certainly an indispensable one. Water defended the land and also to some extent determined the boundaries of the Republic.

The Eighty Years' War was essentially a war of sieges: there were a handful of battles and countless skirmishes of greater or lesser consequence, but the war was decided by the taking and losing of fortresses and fortified towns. The large-scale introduction of firearms, and particularly cannon, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had forced the development of new defensive systems: high curtain walls which were vulnerable to cannon-fire were replaced by the bastion-centred system of low thick walls protected by outworks. Defence by height was replaced by defence in breadth, and water-filled moats and rivers could play a vital part in keeping besiegers at a distance and hindering attacks.¹³ The Northern Netherlands with its numerous towns and abundance and, indeed, over-abundance of water was well placed to exploit the new possibilities. The Dutch found that the ruthless exploitation of water, not just by the use of moats and rivers, but by cutting the dykes and flooding the area surrounding a besieged town or fortress, more than compensated for any weaknesses in the primary fortifications. The high water table also meant that earthworks could be relatively quickly and easily thrown up at need. At the same time entrenchments dug by besiegers tended to be damp and vulnerable to flooding. With time, fortifications of the new type were constructed for the major towns and strategic forts, but in the first decade or so of the Revolt water played a vital role in enabling the core provinces of

Holland and Zeeland to survive the Spanish-Habsburg counterattack after the first months of the uprising in 1572. The prime examples were the sieges of Haarlem and Leiden: the former fell to the Spanish, but only after a prolonged siege, while the latter held out until 3 October 1574, when it was relieved by rebel forces. In this context it is significant that the relieving force reached Leiden by boat after a large part of southern Holland had been deliberately flooded.

While the tactical importance of water in the first decades of the Eighty Years' War is indisputable, the strategic role of water in the conflict as a whole has been the subject of sometimes heated dispute and crucial misapprehensions. In brief, the great rivers, the Rhine and the Meuse, have been seen as a vital barrier turning back the Spanish-Habsburg reconquest of the northern provinces of the Netherlands. What is clear is that these rivers, along with the IJssel to the east, provided an enormous moat behind which forts and towns defended by the new-style fortifications could shelter. The Southern Netherlands were lost to the Spanish under the duke of Parma in the 1580s, but the north survived at least in part because of its water defences. In the seventeenth century, water appeared to be much less important than armies and navies in the defence of the Republic,¹⁴ especially after the end of the long war with Spain in 1648. Yet in the summer of 1672 water was to be called on once again to save the Dutch state from defeat and perhaps annihilation: the French army invading from the east found the river waters unusually low and the Dutch forces inadequate to defend them, and swept through to the borders of Holland with frightening ease. Here, however, they came up against the *waterlinie* – the water-line. The Dutch had flooded a broad strip of land between the Zuiderzee and the Meuse; the strip proved to be dangerously narrow in some places, but it held, and the French advance was halted. The *waterlinie* was not the only reason for Dutch survival, but it bought time for the other elements in the national and international situation to be brought into play; without this breathing space, the French invasion would have reached the heart of Holland itself and the future of Dutch independence would have been uncertain to say the least.

However, to look solely at the defensive functions of water is to miss its other vital role in the strategic situation of the Dutch in the war against Habsburg Spain. From about the 1580s onwards the Dutch were operating on interior lines, and the ease of transport by water allowed them to move men and materiel to almost any point on an arc which

curved from Groningen in the north to North Brabant and the delta of the great rivers in the south-west. Moreover, troops and supplies could be concentrated at a central point and moved forward only at the last moment, making it very difficult for the enemy to anticipate their movements. Relief forces or supplies could be moved to towns or strongpoints under siege, and troops and equipment to attack any point on the periphery. To counter any defensive or offensive move by the Dutch, the Spanish had to move along the outside of this arc and mostly on land, which made their operations relatively slow and clumsy. In a period when the movement of armies was slow and could easily bog down – literally – in wet weather, and when troops would need rest if they had marched any distance in full equipment, the operational and strategic advantages water transport gave the Dutch within their own territory are clear.

The sea was also both a tactical and a strategic advantage for the Dutch: it can be seen as a very effective moat protecting the coastline, but also as a means of taking the fight to their enemies through the deployment of sea power. However, just as the sea was a vital economic asset but also threatened inundations, so it was a defensive moat but also a potential highway for invasions. A strong navy was essential to the Dutch for both offensive and defensive purposes, and for most of the seventeenth century Dutch maritime power was at least adequate to the task.¹⁵

Threats and Opportunities

The seventeenth century saw a dramatic change in the nature of the centuries-old struggle with the sea, and behind the sea defences the change was even more far-reaching. Agriculture, too, changed, though over a rather longer period, from largely subsistence to highly specialized commercial farming. However, the changes to the relationship of land to water were not all pure gain. There were weaknesses which were the inevitable consequences of the changes: the older *polders* continued to sink and the new ones were well below sea level, which meant that a larger area was now vulnerable to flooding. The consolidation of the land area may have made it easier to protect it from the sea but the technology available for such defence remained essentially the same. A major breach in the sea defences

had become less likely, but the consequences of a failure threatened to be even more costly than in the past. (The damage to the sea-dykes in the following century due to depredations of the *paalworm* (*teredo navalis*) underlined the fragility of the existing defences.) In the event, the situation remained more or less stable for two centuries; as noted earlier, the Haarlemmermeer was drained in the late nineteenth century but, apart from this, major changes came only in the twentieth century with the building of the *afsluitdijk* cutting the Zuiderzee off from the sea, and the creation of new *polders* from the newly formed IJsselmeer. These projects were partly a reaction to the major flooding caused by a storm tide in 1916, but the extent of the continued vulnerability of the Netherlands was perhaps made clear only by the disastrous floods of 1953. On a considerably lesser scale, recent flooding in the eastern Netherlands has given a sharp reminder that flood plains are a vital element in the control of water brought into the Netherlands by the Rhine, Meuse, and other rivers.

The relationship between water and land remains of essential significance to the modern Netherlands. The gains of the seventeenth century still hold, but new threats are appearing. The success of Europoort is a striking example of the benefits the sea is still able to provide for the Netherlands, but rising sea levels present a perhaps commensurate threat. The sea giveth, and the sea taketh away.

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Migration

The Dutch Republic often fascinated and sometimes shocked foreign observers. While its maritime industries, global trade, and military prowess received widespread admiration, the United Provinces' high level of immigration triggered a mixed response. Contemporary travel accounts regularly commented on the disturbingly high number of 'strangers' in Holland's towns and the variety of faiths they represented. Diversity was even a tourist attraction. Travel guides for seventeenth-century Amsterdam typically included walking tours that passed dissident churches and synagogues, which represented the city's many immigrant communities. In his *Cosmographie* (1652), an ambitious attempt to describe every aspect of the known world, the prolific English ecclesiastic Peter Heylyn concluded pessimistically that Amsterdam '[is] inhabited by men of all Nations, and of all Religions . . . A greater Confusion (in my minde) then that of Babel; this being of Religions, that of Languages only.'¹

Modern scholarship has largely confirmed this striking image of a society 'of all nations'. Stimulated by a quantitative turn in historical studies in the 1960s and 1970s, social historians have reconstructed the composition of seventeenth-century Dutch society and demonstrated how international immigration transformed its cities. Estimates suggest that between 1600 and 1800 about 600,000 foreigners settled in the United Provinces, a country whose population had been 1.5 million for most of its existence. The influx from abroad was particularly profound in the province of Holland. In the early 1600s about 40 per cent of Amsterdam's inhabitants were foreign-born; in Haarlem and Leiden foreigners made up about 55 per cent of the total population.² Yet unlike Peter Heylyn, modern scholars also contend that high levels of

immigration were intrinsically connected to Dutch achievements in trade, industry, and warfare.

Migration may be key to our understanding of the Dutch Golden Age, but its significance is not easy to gauge. This is a problem of definition, language, and data. Firstly, 'immigration' and 'emigration' were terms not widely used in the seventeenth century, and contemporary records rarely distinguished among various types of religious refugees, labour migrants, or travellers. It was the language of community, privilege, and order that framed early modern descriptions of migration. Thus, 'stranger' was the word commonly used to label anyone considered a newcomer. Secondly, and relatedly, mobility could be understood quite differently from our sense of the phenomenon today. Migration is generally defined as a movement of people who cross borders. In pre-modern Europe borders took a variety of forms. Political boundaries existed between sovereign states, but equally important were the legal demarcations of provinces and towns, which claimed their own jurisdictions. A traveller from Friesland to Amsterdam could therefore be regarded as an immigrant in the latter. In the mindset of contemporaries such political borders were regularly trumped by religious ones. Some Calvinists preferred to view their community as a transnational Protestant brotherhood. Discontented Dutch Catholics fashioned themselves 'inner exiles' whose spiritual dislocation depended on a lifeline with Rome. For Jews, the notion of 'diaspora' was firmly grounded in their understanding of community, too.

Thirdly, then, movements across such real and imagined borders could be temporary or permanent, voluntary or coerced, or might be part of a longer journey. Thousands of foreigners who arrived in the United Provinces used local ports to continue their travels overseas. In Asia, Africa, and the Americas these 'transmigrants' were confronted with yet another form of mobility that characterized the world of Dutch 'Golden Age': the forced migration and enslavement of indigenous African and Asian populations. Since none of these human movements, whether undertaken voluntarily or effected by force, were registered systematically in the seventeenth century, surviving data about migration are patchy and subject to interpretation. What is more, historians of early modern religion, art, labour, and slavery have largely studied the effects of migration within the boundaries of their respective historiographical tradition. By integrating these different strands of

scholarship, this chapter seeks to map long-distance mobility in its various guises and gauge its impact on social conditions, economic development, religious experience, and cultural taste.

Forces and Patterns

Immigration was not a new phenomenon in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. Being relatively urbanized and strategically positioned in the North Sea river delta, the western provinces of the Low Countries had experienced a permanent and varied influx of newcomers throughout the later Middle Ages. As centres of international trade, towns in Flanders, Brabant, Holland, and Zeeland accommodated communities of Italian, Iberian, English, and German merchants and regularly called upon seasonal workers to staff their fleet and industries. Some of these labour migrants came from the surrounding inland provinces, others from farther away, particularly the German lands and northern France. Antwerp, the metropolis of the sixteenth-century Low Countries, was especially famous for its cosmopolitan profile. When the Italian merchant Lodovico Guicciardini summarized his impressions of the area around 1566, he asserted that ‘the foreigners in Antwerp and in all these Netherlands have more freedoms than anywhere else in the world’.³

The outbreak of the Dutch Revolt in the 1560s disrupted these patterns of international trade, exchange, and mobility. At the same time, the civil war triggered an unprecedented refugee crisis that would transform the demographic composition of the Low Countries forever. In the early phases of the troubles (1560s–70s) at least 60,000 Netherlanders fled the war’s violence and religious persecution by moving to safe havens in neighbouring countries, notably England and the Holy Roman Empire. The shifting course of the Revolt in the later sixteenth century generated additional forced migrations, both Protestant and Catholic. The most significant of these was the flight of about 100,000 men and women from the major cities in the south (Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent) after these were taken by Habsburg forces in 1584–5. The majority of the southern refugees moved to the northern, rebel-controlled provinces of Holland and Zeeland. By 1600, they made up about a third of the total population of Leiden, Haarlem, and Amsterdam.⁴

Table 3.1 *Migration and urban growth in Holland (estimates)*

Town	1570	1600	1622	1672
Amsterdam	30,000	60,000	105,000	200,000
Leiden	15,000	26,000	44,500	72,000
Haarlem	16,000	30,000	39,500	50,000
Rotterdam	7,000	12,000	19,500	45,000
The Hague	5,000	10,000	15,750	30,000

Source: J. L. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806*, Oxford, 1995, 328–32; J. van Lottum, *Across the North Sea: The Impact of the Dutch Republic on International Labour Migration, c. 1550–1850*, Amsterdam, 2007.

Refugees from the south cemented Holland's position as the commercial heartland of the emerging Dutch Republic. In the following decades, its maritime hubs continued to attract vast numbers of newcomers. Movements from the Republic's inland provinces, including Friesland, Overijssel, and Gelderland, contributed to this demographic upheaval, but immigration from abroad was the most conspicuous current in the flow to Holland's urban centres. Probably the largest group comprised Germans and Scandinavians, whose numbers peaked during the Thirty Years War (1618–48). Smaller groups of Scots, English Puritans and Quakers, and Sephardic ('Portuguese') and Ashkenazi ('High German') Jews settled in the Dutch provinces, too. While immigration rates gradually diminished after the 1660s, there was a notable spike around 1685, when about 35,000 French Huguenots sought refuge in the Dutch Republic. As Table 3.1 reveals, these domestic and foreign influxes caused a dramatic expansion of towns in Holland and to a lesser extent Zeeland. Amsterdam grew from a medium-sized town of about 30,000 inhabitants in the 1570s to a metropolis of 200,000 in the later seventeenth century.⁵ By 1650 the city was, after London and Paris, northern Europe's third-largest urban conglomeration.

Patterns of migration reveal the push and pull factors that created them. Some scholars have highlighted economic opportunity as the main incentive spurring migration in the Golden Age. Jan Lucassen, for one, has shown how demands on the labour market and high wages

determined the movement and recruitment of specific types of migrants from elsewhere in Europe.⁶ Unskilled Germans and Scandinavians largely filled the ranks of the low-paid sectors of the booming maritime economy. In Leiden, the influx of Flemish textile workers in the 1580s coincided with a rejuvenation of its drapery industries. This economic dynamic may also explain the striking gender imbalance among foreign immigrants: men are overrepresented in the records that address migration. Other scholars have privileged religious freedom as an explanation for mobility. In the Union of Utrecht (1579), the United Provinces had formally guaranteed freedom of conscience to all. Although the interpretation of the clause varied according to time and place, religious pluralism became a notable feature of seventeenth-century Dutch society. It is telling that many of its tolerated faith communities were, in fact, connected to specific groups of foreigners: Lutheran churches, Walloon congregations, and Portuguese synagogues largely catered to immigrants. A growing body of scholarship suggests that, for many individuals, such religious and material motivations were inextricably intertwined. Thus, thousands of German Protestants left their homes in the 1620s and 1630s because of religious conflict and dire living conditions, but they consciously chose a host society where they expected to make a living and to express their faith. The Dutch Republic seemed to offer just those opportunities.

An Immigrant Society

Although immigration figures were unevenly spread across the United Provinces – the majority of newcomers settled in the urban centres of Holland – they profoundly changed Dutch society. In economic terms, immigration brought new knowledge, capital, and trading networks, but also accelerated the proletarianization of human labour. The arrival of well-connected entrepreneurs from Antwerp and skilled Flemish textile workers effectively kick-started the commercial expansion of the 1590s. Growing demand for foreign labour in the following decades caused thousands of previously self-employed German and Scandinavian farmers to move to Holland, too. Once settled, they became urbanites dependent on wage labour. The expanding fleets and shipyards of trading companies relied heavily on the recruitment of these and other labourers from abroad. By the mid seventeenth century, almost half of the sailing employees of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) consisted

of foreigners. In the later seventeenth century, French Huguenots and Sephardic Jews again brought new industries and financial experience to the Dutch Republic, although their precise economic impact has been subject to debate. In any case, the continuous flow of newcomers transformed the urban fabric of Holland. Towns that appealed to immigrants such as Amsterdam, Leiden, Haarlem, Rotterdam, Enkhuizen, and Hoorn invested in large-scale building projects, including the expansion of city walls, the renewal of harbour infrastructure, and the design and construction of entirely new neighbourhoods. Amsterdam's planned Jordaan district, for example, was said to be the home of an exotic mixture of foreign accents by the 1620s.⁷

Demographic change redefined religious life. In the 1580s, Calvinist refugees from Flanders and Brabant bolstered the still weak position of the Reformed Church in Holland. The prominence – real or imagined – of immigrants in the public church of the Republic added to the paralysing religious disputes of the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–21). The Arminian factions within the Reformed Church regularly expressed xenophobia to discredit the theocratic tendencies of Calvinists by portraying them as foreigners. Immigration also changed other Christian denominations, including the Lutheran community. The Amsterdam Lutheran congregation, by far the country's largest, developed into a hub for thousands of immigrant Germans and Scandinavians; its sermons were typically given in German. The large number of foreigners in Dutch church communities may also explain their strong international orientation. Confessional conflicts elsewhere in Europe regularly incited Protestant churches to organize relief operations and fundraising campaigns for their repressed co-religionists abroad. Grounded in the belief that many religious communities in the United Provinces had themselves grown out of a history of persecution and flight, this type of transnational solidarity was as much an act of charity as an exercise in confessional self-fashioning.

Migration fuelled the production of art and inspired new lifestyles. Numerous innovations in the fields of painting, cartography, and architecture, including some now considered icons of 'Dutch' Golden Age art and culture, originated from the minds of immigrant artists or were driven by the shifting taste of new foreign clients. Among other things, the popular printed cityscape, which framed the image of Amsterdam as a commercial metropolis, was an import product of immigrant publishers. The Dutch school of painting owes many of its characteristics to the creative integration of foreign taste, imported production methods, and

more established artistic traditions. Eric Jan Sluijter has shown how the sudden wave of inexpensive paintings from Antwerp in the early 1600s triggered the development of innovative painting techniques in Holland. The celebrated 'Dutch' genre of landscape painting is just one example. Well-known artists such as Frans Hals, Gerard de Lairese, and Daniël Marot were born outside the United Provinces. In intellectual spheres, the impact of mobility was no less profound. The Dutch Republic developed a large printing and publishing industry that was famous for its international orientation. Relatively weak state censorship and political patronage enabled migrant authors such as René Descartes and John Locke to publish their controversial works. At Leiden University, about half of the professors and students came from abroad, which added to its academic prestige.⁸

Immigration had distinct effects at the higher ends of society. The princes of Orange and their cousins, the counts of Nassau, originated from Germany and held widespread possessions in the Holy Roman Empire, France, and the Southern Netherlands. Their courts constituted a multi-national community that included numerous Protestant nobles from elsewhere in Europe. Many of the noblemen also held positions in the higher echelons of the Dutch army, which recruited thousands of foreigners annually. Indeed, under the Stadholders Maurice and Frederick Henry, the States Army functioned as an eminent international training school. Dynastic marriage politics furthered the Orange court's cosmopolitan outlook, as it quickly absorbed German, English, and French tastes. Its base in The Hague became the temporary home of several exiled royals, such as the Elector Palatine, Frederick V, and his wife, Elizabeth Stuart, from 1621. In the later 1640s, the prince of Wales, the later Charles II, settled there, too. Court culture in the officially republican state thus developed a profoundly international flavour, which has often been contrasted to the dominant bourgeois image of the Dutch Golden Age.⁹

Integration and Community Building

Not well equipped to control the movements of people, early modern states rarely developed coherent immigration policies. As a rule, political borders were porous and policing resources limited. In the Dutch Republic, the politics of immigration was primarily a local affair

because of decentralized state structures. Some towns, such as Leiden, actively recruited particular types of skilled immigrants and instituted legislation that excluded unwanted, needy potential newcomers. In nearby Delft, the local authorities used the confiscated properties of former Catholic convents to accommodate refugees from Flanders in the later sixteenth century. Such efforts did not prevent local populations from regarding immigration with suspicion and resisting it. In a society where the notion of a unified *corpus christianum* remained an important frame of reference, the influx of 'strangers' posed an evident threat to the social fabric of urban communities.

Recurring themes voiced by immigration's critics included the newcomers' alleged political ambitions, religious fanaticism, and misuse of charity and welfare facilities. The purportedly degenerative effects of foreign taste and lifestyle were worrying, too. Such tropes featured regularly in popular plays such as the *Spanish Brabanter* (1617) by Gerard Bredero. In this farce, stories about the lofty, frivolous, and unreliable behaviour of Brabanter and Flemish immigrants are contrasted with the sincerity and directness of native Hollanders. 'The eye can well behold a man and know him not at all' is the ominous motto of Bredero's play, voicing the anxiety and nostalgia produced in response to a society being transformed by people regarded as strangers.¹⁰

Against this background, it is perhaps surprising that most newcomers appear to have integrated with relative ease into Dutch society. Immigration certainly put pressure on housing markets, and the arrival of indigent strangers regularly fuelled concerns about charity and criminality. But even during the peaks of the 1590s and 1620s, such worries never led to open resistance or organized urban protests against immigration. Several explanations have been brought forward for this pattern of acceptance and social integration. Taking the notion of 'membership regimes' as a point of departure, some scholars have stressed the accommodating policies of local governments. It is notable, for example, that corporate and commercial facilities in many towns in Holland were relatively open to (wealthy) outsiders, which allowed them to establish themselves as respectable members of the urban community. The magistrates of Amsterdam famously stated in 1607 that 'strangers' and those who held formal citizenship would be treated equally in all financial transactions. Such an open attitude towards

citizenship and the emphasis on judicial equality may have reinforced community-building in the rapidly changing city.¹¹

A related government strategy concerned attempts to foster a united urban culture. Jo Spaans and Benjamin Kaplan, among others, have shown that town magistrates supported the development of a city symbolism that was distinctly non-confessional, enabling citizens and immigrants of various religious backgrounds to identify with it.¹² The Damiate cult of Haarlem and the decorative programme of Amsterdam's Town Hall are examples of this religiously neutral, accommodating attitude. In a similar vein, migration historians have pointed to the importance of religious corporatism. More specifically, they assert that religious institutions guided integration processes in Dutch towns. Authorities compelled their tolerated denominations – Reformed, Anabaptist, Lutheran, Catholic, and (in some cases) Jewish – to act as support networks for their immigrant members. Churches thus provided newcomers not only with spiritual care but also with forms of charity and education, and facilitated contacts with local officials. Church discipline served as an additional instrument of policing and punishment for transgressive behaviour. According to this line of argument, social integration in seventeenth-century Dutch society implied the creation of separate, parallel immigrant communities.

To these largely institutional and top-down perspectives, several cultural markers of social integration may be added. Rapid demographic change coincided with grass-roots attempts to forge common Dutch identities. Simon Schama has demonstrated how self-declared independence from Habsburg Spain prompted the development of new patriotic discourses in the early 1600s. Some of these framed the causes of the revolt as a fight for freedom against Hispanic tyranny or sought to justify the foundation of a Protestant society by presenting the war as a struggle for religious truth. Particularly influential were narratives about a providential New Israel and the so-called Batavian myth. The latter suggested that the struggle against Habsburg Spain had been a repetition of the Batavians' fight against Roman oppression in 70 AD. Conscious of the need to write themselves into this emerging national rhetoric, immigrants played a key role in its construction. In pamphlets, urban chronicles, and prints, authors and publicists with immigrant backgrounds glorified the Dutch state as a bastion of freedom for those who were resisting religious coercion and repression. By doing so, they tapped into existing sensibilities about the history of

the Dutch Revolt and its refugee crisis, with which many Dutch citizens identified. This reading of the United Provinces also provided a rationale for a continuing engagement with victims of religious warfare and displaced minorities in the seventeenth century. In the words of the French philosopher Pierre Bayle, the Dutch Republic was widely regarded as 'the great ark of the refugees' of his times. Commemorative texts and poems published after the peace with Spain in 1648 similarly framed the Dutch Republic as a natural safe haven for persecuted dissenters.¹³ Stories of immigration were thus fused with declarations of patriotism.

Emigration

The Dutch Republic may have been a society of immigrants, but the effects of mobility were specific to localities. In many eastern provinces, demographic stability and (temporary) migration to Holland reshaped rural life. The Twente region in Overijssel, for example, experienced a seasonal movement of young men and women who typically spent the spring and summer months in the maritime provinces. Fortified garrison towns in southern areas, including 's Hertogenbosch, Bergen op Zoom, and Maastricht, struggled to maintain their population in the seventeenth century. The same was true for the IJssel towns of Zwolle, Zutphen, and Deventer, whose population decreased in each case from about 10,000 in the 1570s to mere 7,000 by the mid seventeenth century. Attempts to reverse their gradual decline by attracting immigrants met with limited success. In 1592, the town of Kampen offered free citizenship to newcomers 'of whatever nation they may be', while Zutphen experimented with attractive tax incentives. Nevertheless, a steady emigration from the eastern towns to the maritime west continued to affect these areas.¹⁴ In addition, it appears that outward mobility and emigration from the United Provinces were equally powerful demographic forces. To a large extent, waves of emigration and immigration were intrinsically linked. Two categories of leavers illuminate this connection.

One group of emigrants comprised malcontents, who contested the legitimacy and morality of a Protestant Dutch state. From the start of the revolt in the 1570s, several thousand committed Catholics and Habsburg loyalists had escaped the rebel areas. A number of

Catholic exile communities gradually emerged, mostly in the Southern Netherlands (Antwerp, Brussels, Louvain, Douai) and the Holy Roman Empire (Emmerich, Kalkar, Cologne). Although the number of Catholic émigrés diminished after the 1590s, a string of self-conscious exile communities continued to flourish. They developed educational facilities, sites of pilgrimage, and a printing press that catered to stay-at-home Catholics in the United Provinces. In the university town of Douai, for example, Dutch exiles, students, and travellers gathered together to venerate the Beata Maria Hollandica, an effigy of the Virgin Mary from Leiden, which had miraculously survived iconoclasm during the Revolt. The Collegium Anticollense at Cologne and the Collegium Pulcheriae Mariae Virginis at Louvain provided Dutch Catholics with a tailored, orthodox training centre for their children. In a sense, these exile foundations represented an imagined community of faith, expressing the idea of a Dutch 'counter-society' across the border: a pure Netherlands that remained unspoiled by heresy or dubious Republican authority.¹⁵

It was not just Catholic loyalists who opposed the new order and confronted Dutch authorities with an unresolved 'exile problem'. Protestant dissenters and supporters of the Oldenbarnevelt regime escaped the United Provinces after Stadholder Maurice of Nassau's successful coup in 1618. About eighty Arminian ministers were actually formally banished. The Dutch Republic may have granted freedom of conscience to all citizens, but its governing elites were not particularly tolerant of critical voices that undermined their authority. Precisely because the United Provinces constituted a new polity in early modern Europe, its leaders seem to have been sensitive towards forms of opposition that challenged the legitimacy of the improvised state. In addition, religious radicals and libertines, such as adherents of Socinianism and followers of Spinoza, had to be careful, especially when their philosophical ideas had wider political implications. Some dissenters, including the legal scholar Hugo Grotius and the libertine Adrian Beverland, felt compelled to settle abroad.¹⁶ While emigration may have presented very different incentives for these individuals and groups, they all shared the experience of being considered outcasts from the Republic. In rebuilding its society after the Revolt, the United Provinces were as much shaped by newcomers from abroad as by departing non-conformists.

A second category of emigration was even more directly connected to parallel forces of immigration. Not all of the tens of thousands who moved to the Netherlands from elsewhere in Europe settled there permanently. Many took advantage of the United Provinces' global ambitions to continue their travels overseas. In the seventeenth century the VOC conveyed about 317,000 men and women, about half of them foreign-born, to its Asian enterprises. Smaller numbers signed up with the Dutch West India Company (WIC) and emigrated to the settler colonies of New Netherland or the plantations at Dutch Brazil and later Suriname. At the WIC's base of New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) only half of the registered settlers were, strictly speaking, 'Dutch'. With a population of about 1.5 million, the Dutch Republic was far too small to build and maintain a global presence strictly on its own. Wars and refugee crises elsewhere in Europe could therefore be considered blessings in disguise. The Amsterdam city council, for instance, complained in 1642 that '[because of] the current hostilities everywhere in Europe . . . many refugees and those affected by war arrive in the city in great numbers, every day'.¹⁷ But these waves of refugees also enabled Amsterdam to pursue its American and Asian colonization projects.

Contemporaries were well aware of the demographic challenges and opportunities that came with empire-building. Initially, the VOC and WIC had tried to populate their emerging global networks by sending Dutch families and orphans to the colonies. When these schemes proved ineffective, the recruitment of refugees and other immigrants took centre stage. Publicist Adriaen van der Donck, for one, argued in 1655 that Holland had become overcrowded with newcomers and that it would be 'advantageous and easy . . . to create another Netherland outside these Low Countries with the help of unnecessary and redundant folk here'.¹⁸ Geopolitical events elsewhere in Europe could further such strategies. During the 'Piedmont Easter massacre' and its evolving crisis in 1656, the magistrate of Amsterdam used local newspapers to advertise attractive conditions for Waldensian refugees who were willing to move to the city's American colony of New Amstel (in present-day New Castle, Delaware). When the repressive policies of Louis XIV in France sparked a Huguenot diaspora in the 1680s, the VOC immediately identified its potential to suit the company's needs. Arriving French refugees were welcomed and recruited for the Cape Colony in South Africa. The VOC also planned an attack on strategic French-held islands in the Indian Ocean, purportedly as 'compensation' for the lost properties abandoned

by Huguenots escaping France.¹⁹ Refugee crises elsewhere in Europe thus facilitated Dutch global expansion.

Forced Migration and Slavery

Human trafficking provided the backbone of the Dutch experience overseas. But the global relocation of thousands of men and women from Europe was just one side of the coin. After some initial hesitation, the Dutch also turned to forced migration and coerced labour to fulfil their ambitions in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Slavery and the slave trade were officially forbidden in the United Provinces, but this proscription was not maintained in its self-declared possessions outside Europe. Especially after the taking of Brazil in 1630, the Dutch bought and used enslaved Africans on a large scale to run their sugar plantations. Between 1635 and 1651, 31,533 men and women were taken and shipped from ports in West Africa – 26,286 of them survived the Atlantic crossing. After the loss of Brazil in the 1650s, the Dutch continued their involvement with the slave trade. The WIC's plantation economies in Suriname and the Caribbean were dependent on the systematic employment of Africans throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For this purpose, the company maintained several slave-trading forts along the coast of Africa, including Elmina in present-day Ghana (see Map 2). A considerable number of enslaved Africans were traded to other European colonists, such as the Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French. Altogether it has been estimated that the Dutch transported between 163,000 and 232,000 enslaved Africans in the seventeenth century, which made them a significant player in the Atlantic slave trade.²⁰

In the Indian Ocean, the VOC faced similar problems populating its dense web of trading posts. Around 1688, the company had about 22,000 employees in its fleet and its fortresses in Asia, an insufficient number to run a global company effectively. Like its Atlantic counterpart, the VOC therefore relied on slavery, in addition to its European and Asian contract labour. Precise figures are difficult to establish, due to the great variety of forms of coerced labour that the company used in its scattered territories. In India and the Indonesian archipelago some indigenous populations were compelled to work on plantations, in factories, and in households. These local workforces supplemented men and women from elsewhere in Asia, who were transported by force. For example,

between 1621 and 1665, Dutch ships moved about 38,000 men and women from Pulicat, India, to the VOC's headquarters at Batavia on Java. Individual VOC employees seem to have profited from growing labour demands by setting up private slave-trading ventures. Arab and Indian traders supplied coerced labourers to the company, too. Penal servitude served as the final form of forced migration. By exiling the law's offenders from Java to the Cape Colony in South Africa, the VOC sought to turn its criminal justice system into a labour pipeline.²¹ In spite of its self-styled image of liberty and tolerance, the Dutch Republic proved a repressive and opportunistic exploiter of the populations it encountered overseas.

The Dutch involvement with slavery across the globe had repercussions back home. Numerous Amsterdam and Zeeland families acquired fortunes that were linked – directly or indirectly – to their investments in coerced human trafficking. And though slavery was illegal in the United Provinces, a number of entrepreneurs brought enslaved Africans there to work in their households. Sephardic Jews probably introduced this practice in the early seventeenth century. Although the total number of sub-Saharan Africans living in the Netherlands remained relatively small, some featured prominently in lavish family portraits, such as Jan Mijtens' painting of Margaretha van Raephorst (Figure 3.1). The frequent inclusion of black boys or 'Moors' in still-life paintings – sometimes portrayed as mere stereotypes or as an exotic commodity – similarly exemplifies the racial implications of the Dutch global experience.²²

Stories of Migrations

Migrations of the Dutch Golden Age were at once distinct and connected with one another. Religious refugees, labour migrants, expelled outcasts, and enslaved Africans shared little more than the experience of mobility, which affected their lives in very different ways. Still, the patterns and driving forces behind their disparate movements were often linked. The life story of Georgius Candidius illustrates these distinctions and connections. Born in Kirchartd in the German Palatinate in 1597, Candidius fled his home town during the early years of the Thirty Years War. Like many displaced Protestants, he found asylum in the Dutch Republic, receiving a scholarship in theology



Figure 3.1 Jan Mijtens, *Portrait of Margaretha van Raephorst*, 1668.

from Leiden University. After his graduation in 1623, Candidius continued his religiously spurred peregrinations overseas. The VOC first solicited his services at the trading post at Ternate in the Moluccas. Here, the refugee-turned-Reformed minister became part of a mixed community of European colonists, enslaved indigenous populations, and imported labourers from elsewhere on the Indonesian archipelago. Candidius' tenure was followed by a post at the Dutch church on

Formosa, present-day Taiwan. The latter position inspired him to compose a manual for the Reformed mission in Asia. His *Discours* (1628) reveals how much his migratory experiences had shaped his world-view, in which stories of refuge, exile and mission were intertwined. Candidius returned to the United Provinces in 1639 but travelled to Asia again four years later. In 1647 he died in Batavia as rector of the Latin School, an exotic European export product that catered to Dutch immigrants and Eurasian orphans alike.²³

The travels of Georgius Candidius demonstrate not only how migration shaped the world of the Dutch Golden Age, but also how it affected the thoughts, world-views, and self-images of those who lived through it. Stories of migration played a powerful, if ambiguous, role in the Dutch imagination in the seventeenth century. On the one hand, they served as tools of religious identification and cultural integration. The experience of revolt and the forced displacements in the sixteenth century had fostered the development of a popular discourse that framed religious exile as a heroic experience. In the seventeenth century, these cultivated memories of refuge were fused with a patriotic discourse. Narratives of New Israel, Batavian freedom, or Amsterdam cosmopolitanism were all built on a strong engagement with stories of exile and mobility. Yet on the other hand, migratory experiences could also function as tokens of social exclusivity and justify Dutch interventions and aggression abroad. The proud descendants of the victims of 'Hispanic tyranny' and religious exile showed little hesitation when human trafficking and slavery elsewhere in the world offered them economic opportunities. Migration was both the cause and the outcome of the Dutch Golden Age.

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Part II

A State of War

The Armed Forces

War was one of the key determinants of Dutch success in the seventeenth century. This was true not simply in the rather self-evident sense that without victory against the Habsburg rulers in the Dutch Revolt or the Eighty Years' War there would have been no independent Dutch Republic; or in the only slightly less self-evident sense that Dutch commercial expansion both within Europe and in other parts of the world was underwritten by the large-scale deployment of military violence. It was also true in a less obvious sense: the manner in which the Dutch state organized its armed forces, though costly to society, allowed those with wealth and power to profit substantially both from the ways in which the army and navy were put to use, and from their upkeep. In 1637, the Dutch Raad van State (Council of State) noted what many other contemporary observers confirmed:

War is ruinous for other countries, but it did strengthen the United Provinces in its trade, riches, and power, it did improve its territories and cities, and those funds extracted from the common people seemed to return by other ways again, like the waters which are transported by the rivers into the sea and which are returned by nature to its resources in a way unknown to us.¹

This chapter provides an overview of the evolution of the Dutch armed forces from the loose rebel bands on land and at sea at the start of the Dutch Revolt to the organized and well-funded army, navy, and Company troops of the mid and late seventeenth century. Special attention will be given to the interaction between military developments and commercial expansion, both at home and abroad.

Using a modern analogy, one could say that warfare for the Dutch Republic facilitated the emergence of a powerful military-industrial complex, or perhaps a combination of military-financial, military-commercial, and military-manufacturing complexes, at the heart of the state. The history of early modern warfare has often been written as a clinical exercise, dissecting the anatomy of power. While this chapter, too, will sketch the history and organization of the armed forces, it will also take a brief look at the human consequences of warfare for those who found themselves at the opposite end of Dutch weapons at home and abroad, as well as at the labour conditions and forms of resistance of the soldiers and sailors who wielded them.²

From Rebel Troops to Organized Armed Forces: A Military Revolution?

The emergence of the Dutch Republic as a globally operating military power can be traced back to the transformation of the armed forces during the first half of the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648). The political events leading to the outbreak and spread of the Dutch Revolt in the second half of the 1560s, and eventually to the establishment of an independent state in the seven northern provinces and the collapse of resistance in the ten southern provinces, are described elsewhere in this book. Here it is important to note that the success of the northern provinces entailed a thorough transformation of the nature of the armed struggle. Initially, the core of the rebel forces had consisted of Dutch and foreign mercenary troops paid by William of Orange out of his own meagre treasury. During the reign of Philip II's governor, the duke of Alba, these were supplemented by roving bands of exiles named the Sea Beggars, who committed acts of piracy on land and at sea and engaged in privateering, and by largely untrained volunteers. Such motley forces stood against the vastly superior royal troops, which explains why between 1568 and 1581, out of the nine battles waged on land, the soldiers of the Habsburg crown won all but one.³ It was the largely accidental coming together of a lucky strike by the Sea Beggars at the small Holland town Den Briel and a string of urban revolts against new taxes and the harsh regime of the duke of Alba which in

the spring of 1572 unexpectedly gave the rebel forces a foothold in the Netherlands.

The 1570s and 1580s saw frantic attempts by the leaders of the Revolt to knit together the loose and often improvised elements of their army and navy into a well-organized force. This was a two-sided process. On the one hand, the room for independent operation by 'guerrilla'-type bands – more or less autonomous commanders and civic militias which had played a prominent part in the fighting during the first years of the Revolt – was closed down. In 1581, William of Orange famously decreed that civic militias should no longer be consulted in city politics – a highly symbolic measure limiting influence 'from below' on the course of the struggle. On the other hand, the emerging state managed to strengthen its control over its paid troops. An important element in transforming the nature of army discipline was the struggle that first William of Orange, and then with even greater success his son Maurice of Nassau, waged against the traditional *landsknecht*-organization of mercenary companies. This guild-like system allowed soldiers quite a lot of power over the terms of their employment and ensured the internal cohesion of the army unit, not only against the enemy soldiers but also against the state and its paymasters. Even under William of Orange, this form of organization was already gradually broken down. Under his command, elected positions within the unit were replaced by a strict system of appointment from above, and traditional privileges of the *landsknecht* such as a relatively high salary and short-term contract were limited. Maurice followed this up with his famous army reforms, introducing stricter discipline enforced by a heavy punishment regime, standardized armaments, and an elaborate training regime that allowed for a tactical revolution in the use of firearms. All of this earned Maurice a prominent place in the literature on the 'Military Revolution'. This term is used for the series of changes in seventeenth-century warfare that fostered the employment of ever larger armies, supported by escalating state finances and increasingly sophisticated state bureaucracies. Extensive professionalization of the Dutch army, the large-scale application of new scientific insights on fortress-building and siege warfare, and a revolution in state finances made the Dutch army one of the driving forces of the Europe-wide changes in the organization of warfare.⁴

The organization of the States Army into an increasingly professional and top-down controlled force was accompanied by, and could not have succeeded without, the thorough reform of state finances and the creation of new bureaucratic institutions. Within the framework of the Union of Utrecht, the States General assumed responsibility over military affairs. In the 1580s, a Council of State (*Raad van State*) was installed as the executive body of the States General in military affairs, responsible for drafting the yearly army budgets. However, the individual provinces remained responsible for the payment of 'their own' army units. Regional influence over the armed forces was solidified even more in the case of the navy. Between 1576 and 1597, five separate Admiralty Boards were established, each managing the organization and equipment of a section of the Dutch Republic's war fleets from their own regional base. Three Admiralty Boards were based in Holland, one in Zeeland, and one in Friesland. The daily management of admiralty affairs was overseen by colleges in which representatives of different cities rotated seats. While the army was paid by the provinces from general taxation, the five Admiralty Boards had to finance themselves primarily through customs on foreign trade. Given that the federal system of representation on the Admiralty Boards gave great weight to the very merchant elite that had to pay these customs, this created continuous tensions over the matter of tax evasion. However, local merchants were also dependent on the outfitting of convoying and cruising fleets that became one of the key tasks of the navy, resulting in some willingness to contribute to bearing the costs of protection.

Professionalization of the navy remained a much slower process than in the army, as naval warfare remained heavily reliant on the employment of temporarily armed merchant ships and their crews until well into the seventeenth century. It was only in the wake of the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–4) that a 'tactical revolution' at sea forced the Dutch state to construct a standing fleet of purpose-built warships.⁵ Nevertheless, despite these limitations, professionalization went far enough to give the newly established Dutch Republic important advantages over its Habsburg adversaries on land and at sea. Finally, the 1580s and 1590s saw the beginnings of Dutch commercial expansion into the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The first ventures were undertaken through private initiative, but the States General soon started to consider the potential for taking the war to

the Iberian overseas empires. In 1602 and 1621 respectively, the East India Company (VOC) and West India Company (WIC) were established. These chartered companies combined trade monopolies with state-like prerogatives, including the right to make treaties or declare war in the name of the States General, build fortresses, raise armies, and administer (military) justice. They became powerful instruments of expansion in their own right.

As a result of these developments, the 1590s saw a fundamental shift in the nature of the war. A string of successful campaigns and sieges allowed the States Army to drive the royal troops from most of the northern provinces, securing the 'Garden of Holland'. At sea, after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 Dutch fleets greatly enlarged their area of operation while upholding the blockade of the Flemish coast. The blockade was one of the factors allowing Amsterdam to take over Antwerp's position as Europe's staple market. The Dutch now faced their European competitors not as a rebel region, but as an independent state that could wield considerable military might. Two large-scale operations at the turn of the seventeenth century made this reversal of fates abundantly clear. In 1599, a fleet of 73 ships carrying 7,600 men under the guidance of Vice-Admiral Pieter van der Does sailed to the coast of Spain in order to attack the port city of La Coruña and blockade the Spanish coast. One of the primary aims was to intercept the Spanish fleets that were leaving to and returning from the Americas. When this failed, the Dutch fleet sailed to the Canary Islands where it destroyed Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, before briefly taking the sugar island Sao Tomé on the West African coast. There, the exposure of European sailors to unknown tropical diseases defeated the Dutch conquerors, killing 1,800 including Van der Does.⁶ But, for the first time, the Dutch navy had operated outside European waters. Ironically, the second landmark shift also took place in the context of a mission that failed in its primary objective. In 1600, the States General ordered the reluctant Stadholder Maurice of Nassau to march into the Spanish-controlled Southern Netherlands to capture the important privateering port of Dunkirk. However, his armies were intercepted at Nieuwpoort. Displaying the full range of the new style of training and tactics that had been introduced in the previous period, the Dutch troops proved superior to the Spanish forces. After attaining victory in battle, Maurice ordered a strategic retreat. Nevertheless, the Battle of

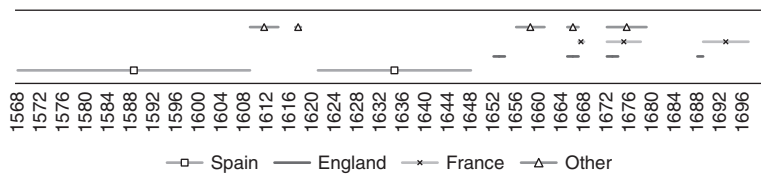


Figure 4.1 Timeline of armed conflicts in Europe involving the Dutch Republic

Nieuwpoort stands as an iconic moment in the Military Revolution and marked the new role of the Dutch Republic in European politics.

An Age of Permanent War

The Dutch ‘Golden Age’ was an age of iron, dirt, and blood. Modern historians have often found it difficult to imagine the Dutch Republic as an aggressively expansionist power. The small size of the country, its barely two million inhabitants, and the emphasis on commerce over conquest in its (European) foreign policy all militate against this. Furthermore, intense conflicts over military spending and grand strategy plunged the state into grave crises in 1617–18, 1650–1, and 1672, and created many smaller moments of tension in between. Often described in more traditional writing as clashes between a ‘pro-war’ party around the House of Orange and a regent ‘peace party’, this has created the illusion that episodic disputes over war priorities reflected deep-seated and permanent opposition within the Dutch state and ruling stratum against war *per se*. This contention is belied by the fact that during the seventeenth century the Dutch state in practice operated as a permanent war state.

Figure 4.1 presents a timeline which includes armed conflicts between the Dutch and one or more major European powers on the continent or in European waters. It shows that, for the entire seventeenth century, three years out of four were years of war in Europe. This still leaves out the many full-scale wars fought by the Dutch East and West India Companies to carve out their respective empires against European competitors, Asian, American, and African

rulers, and indigenous populations. Regardless of whether the Dutch Republic was an enthusiastic or a reluctant imperialist – and the first half of the seventeenth century, especially, provides ample support for the former – the result was a global empire that at the time of its peak geographical reach stretched from the collection of North American settlements called New Netherland to a large part of north-east Brazil; via fortresses along the West African coast from the island of Gorée in Senegambia to the Cape of Good Hope settlement; to the extensive and growing VOC empire in Asia. The proliferation of Dutch armed forces can be measured by, among other things, the number of military outposts built in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In Africa and America, a total of more than 250 separate military structures were erected during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though they were often relatively small and short-lived. In Asia, the VOC around 1790 still possessed 162 fortresses and other armed outposts, and estimates put the total number of military structures that had been in the hands of the Company in the two preceding centuries again around 250. On average, the VOC's fortresses were larger and more durable than their West Indian counterparts.⁷

With such an armed presence all throughout the world, it should come as no surprise that large amounts of resources were mobilized for military purposes. Marjolein 't Hart has calculated that, around 1641, 51.5 per cent of all state expenses went to the army, 26.0 per cent to the navy, and 8.7 per cent to the building and upkeep of (domestic) fortifications.⁸ Military expenditure also weighed heavily on the capital employed by the VOC. Femme Gaastra has estimated that for the eighteenth century, when military expenditures on average were slightly higher than in the second half of the seventeenth century, the VOC offices in the Netherlands paid about f2 million on average per year for military purposes, while about 30 per cent of all costs made by the company in Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries went to war.⁹

One of the reasons why, despite the frequency, cost, and impact of warfare, historians find it difficult to see the Dutch Republic as a war-state is the strangely particularistic organization of its bureaucratic apparatus. For a long time, historians have seen it as self-evident that warfare in the early modern period facilitated the emergence of highly centralized bureaucratic states. But nowadays historians increasingly question this proposition.¹⁰ European states throughout this period

continued to rely heavily on local political elites, merchants, and private suppliers of violence such as mercenaries, privateers, and chartered companies in the organization of their armed forces. In the Dutch Republic, this dependency was taken to the extreme. Despite attempts at centralization, provinces retained full responsibility over the payment of soldiers, the navy remained parcelled out over five organizationally independent Admiralty Boards, and the leading personnel of the relatively lightweight state bureaucracy and the semi-private VOC and WIC provided an intricate patchwork of local and regional representation. While this made policy-making an often painstaking process, it did guarantee an extraordinary level of involvement of the wealthy classes in both the raising of the means of war and the decision-making on their employment. As a result of this involvement, so long as economic and geopolitical success provided a basis for a minimum level of consensus on questions of war and peace within the ruling class, the Dutch state proved capable of producing the levels of violence it needed to maintain a global commercial empire.

The Business of War

The peculiar federal organization of the Dutch state, in combination with the highly commodified nature of the economy, created many opportunities for private gain from warfare. The favours that the Dutch state bestowed on internationally operating private arms dealers, suppliers of provisions to the army and navy, and military financiers laid the basis for some of the biggest fortunes of the seventeenth century. At the same time, production for military purposes left a large imprint on the local economies of smaller garrison towns such as Gorinchem or Doesburg, as well as on cities housing Admiralty Boards and chambers of the VOC and WIC such as Amsterdam and Middelburg. The way in which military markets affected Dutch agriculture after the period of extraordinarily destructive army campaigns in the countryside¹¹ during the Eighty Years' War has hardly been investigated. However, the expansion of commercialized and urban-dominated branches of agriculture such as raising oxen can at least in part be linked to the needs of supplying the navy and the colonial companies.

A well-known example of a family that based its commercial and political fortunes on war is the Trip family. They built an international arms-dealing empire that supplied the war-fronts of Europe with an endless stream of cannons, guns, and bullets. In the same period, the family managed to entrench itself deeply in the political and cultural world of the Amsterdam regents. Several members of the family had their portraits painted by Rembrandt, and in 1660–2 the brothers Louis and Hendrick Trip ordered the building of a stately house along one of the Amsterdam canals. The front of the house was embellished with sculpted cannonballs and olive branches, to illustrate the family motto '*De bello pax*'. The history of their business shows that large arms traders did not inhabit a special economic zone of their own. Rather, the military and the non-military sides of their enterprises were well integrated, and in many ways built upon each other. The late sixteenth-century patriarchs of the family were iron traders in Dordrecht, who also traded in such diverse products as paper, cheese, stock fish, herring, and wine. Jacob Trip, who in the seventeenth century entered the arms trade on a grander scale, at the same time supplied cheese, wine, wood, and grain to the States Army, operated as a ship-owner and as representative of Amsterdam and Liège merchants, and acted as a middleman in troop payments.¹²

Close relationships with, or direct or indirect involvement in the management of, state and semi-state tasks were more often than not instrumental to the mode of operation of such 'war capitalists'. Elias Trip, who moved the family firm from Dordrecht to Amsterdam, was one of the directors of the VOC. In 1616 he became responsible for supervising the VOC's Amsterdam shipyard, for overseeing the Company's ammunition supplies, and for negotiating for protective naval escorts for the VOC from the Amsterdam Admiralty Board. Although state officials were banned explicitly from financial or commercial involvement with their own institutions, many barely concealed routes for profiting remained. One such route was through family connections. This can be seen from the case of Hiob de Wildt, a close associate of Stadholder William III, who was First Secretary of the Amsterdam Admiralty Board during the last three decades of the seventeenth century. His sisters Anna and Eva married the rope and hemp merchants Hendrik and Jan Lijnslager, who were involved in trade with the Amsterdam Admiralty Board and the VOC. In 1691, Anna (by then widowed)

acted as the largest single supplier to the navy, trading rope to a value of almost *f* 200,000. Meanwhile, Hiob himself became prominent in the oxen trade. His estate amounted to the sizeable sum of *f* 170,000.¹³

Large state expenses on warfare also created new opportunities for financiers. This followed two main routes. The first was through state loans. Even though the Dutch Republic throughout the early modern period maintained the largest tax burden per head of the population, the state and its provincial treasuries built up an ever larger state debt. One of the reasons was that the Dutch state retained a consistent preference for indirect taxes such as customs and excises over taxes on wealth. Since tariffs on consumption goods do not discriminate between rich and poor, and because the poor spend a much larger percentage of their income on necessities, the Dutch tax system pressed disproportionately on the lower classes.¹⁴ The gap that the reluctance to introduce taxes on wealth and luxuries left was filled by an innovative system of state loans and annuities, which became a stable form of investment in which both the very rich and the middle classes participated. But private investment was not limited to the income side of state finance. Many investors, officials, and suppliers provided short-term loans to cover part of the state's direct expenses in warfare, for example by accepting promissory notes instead of payment for deliveries. Over the course of the seventeenth century, a lively secondary market for such 'payment ordinances' developed, predicated on the justified notion that, although early modern states were notoriously bad at paying their military and naval bills, the Dutch state was relatively reliable in this respect. A particularly important group of financiers engaged in providing short-term loans for war expenditure were the 'military solicitors', who acted as financial agents supplying credit for paying the troops. In the course of the seventeenth century this form of troop financing became increasingly protected and regulated, leading to the involvement of new groups of specialized financiers.¹⁵

Historians often discuss the making of private profit from state expenditure on armies and navies primarily within the framework of corruption. Certainly, the history of the Dutch Republic provides plenty of examples. When describing a large case of corruption at the Rotterdam Admiralty Board in which administrators had rigged

the auction of prize-goods (i.e. goods captured from enemy ships by privateers), the mid-seventeenth-century chronicler of Dutch war policies Lieuwe van Aitzema sighed: 'That if one examined all Colleges and Magistrates in this way according to their instructions, one could easily say *Domine quis sustinebit* [Lord, who would remain standing?].'¹⁶ Nevertheless, the link between war and the Dutch economy was deeper and more structural than the trope of corruption suggests. Production, trade, and finance for the army, the navy, and the colonial companies, as well as for the international military market, became a large and concentrated terrain for capital accumulation, interlaced at every step with the civilian economy.

Military Violence at Home and Abroad

War affected societies not only indirectly, through its impact on the state and the economy, but also directly, through the actual employment of armed force. One simple reason why permanent war did not prove disruptive for Dutch economic success is that from the final decade of the sixteenth century onwards the rich north-western core region of the Republic did not experience military occupation. But other parts of the country, especially in the south and the east, suffered the presence of warring armies much longer. Only after the successful siege of Den Bosch under Stadholder Frederick Henry in 1629 were the Habsburg troops gradually driven back to the Southern Netherlands. After the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, the eastern provinces experienced an invasion by 20,000 soldiers under the bishop of Münster in 1665, and most of the country was overrun by French and German armies in the 'Year of Disaster' of 1672, when the Dutch Republic was simultaneously at war with France, with the bishops of Münster and Cologne, and with England at sea.

In the context of these wars, the States' troops not only fought foreign armies. Especially during the Eighty Years' War, they also waged war against the Dutch countryside. Because the Dutch Revolt is usually considered an urban affair, this rural aspect has long escaped the attention of historians. A recent study by Leo Adriaenssen has laid bare the full scale and the gruesome impact of warfare on Dutch agricultural regions. Based on a detailed study of

one southern agricultural region, he has shown the ruthlessness with which the Dutch forces wrung tribute from the areas they were sent to 'liberate'. According to his estimates, an alternating policy of scorched-earth campaigns and taxation through plunder led to a drop in population numbers for the rural region (*meierij*) of Den Bosch of 68.5 per cent.¹⁷ In 1587 the States General ordered Maurice to strip bare the southern countryside at the head of an army of 5,000 troops, supported by urban militias from Amsterdam, Leiden, Delft, and several other cities. Thirty to forty villages, including Helmond and Eindhoven, were burned to the ground. In Veghel 500 peasants took up arms to defend their village and were slaughtered by the troops. The deprivation that resulted from such campaigns of both Dutch and Habsburg troops led to mass famine and plague epidemics on a scale similar to that experienced on the German countryside during the notoriously destructive Thirty Years' War. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, tribute raising began to take on a more organized form, and such violent extraction campaigns became less frequent. However, the consequences of warfare had left the rural population powerless to resist the imposition of structurally high levels of taxation, which remained once the war ended. In the same period, urban investors from Holland and other regions started to buy up large stretches of the land that the activities of the opposing armies had left empty. The trauma of violence in the countryside drew deep furrows through popular culture. A mid-seventeenth-century pamphlet presented the readers with a dialogue in verse, in which a fictional peasant tells a soldier:

Oh no! How greatly must the Peasant, the poor Peasant pay:
 From another person's sorrow, it is easy to gather hay.
 Our ruin is the Winter-Garrison
 Get the peasant where oats are good, is the common song.¹⁸

While the immediate experience of military violence became less acute for much of the Dutch population in the final decades of the Eighty Years' War, it remained central to Dutch expansion overseas. In Asia and the Americas, Company troops were frequently engaged in conflicts where they were pitted not only against enemy armies, but also against indigenous populations. In March 1621 1,900 sailors, soldiers, and Asian subsidiary troops under the command of

VOC governor-general Jan Pieterszoon Coen arrived in the Banda Islands to enforce the Company monopoly in the trade in nutmeg and mace. Several thousand people were killed or enslaved in operations that systematically and deliberately depopulated the islands. While Coen's actions on the Banda Islands are remembered as exceptionally cruel, depopulation, enslavement, and mass killings remained frequent parts of VOC wars. In 1666–7, a large VOC fleet established Company rule on Sulawesi (Celebes) by defeating the sultan of Makassar. After the victory, the VOC commander Cornelis Speelman ordered 5,000 prisoners of war to be put on an uninhabitable island, where they perished. In a later war over the control of the Java kingdom Mataram, Speelman alleged: 'The matter has to be dealt with at heart, and the enemy must not only be chased away, but has to be persecuted and unravelled.'¹⁹ Such attitudes also persisted in the colonies in the Atlantic region, where both company soldiers and troops of the States General were employed to control and defend slave-based societies.

Military Labour, Mutiny, and Desertion

Soldiers and others employed in military labour were not only perpetrators of violence, but also its victims. Maurice's tightening of army discipline had included the introduction of the 1590s military regulations, which with dull regularity proscribed the death penalty for insubordination, desertion, and many other offences. In practice the maximum penalty was often not applied, for given the rate at which soldiers broke regulations this would probably have decimated the ranks. Nevertheless, severe corporal punishment was an important aspect of life in the army and the navy, and the death penalty was used in cases where commanders or captains thought it necessary to maintain discipline or restore order. Impressment was forbidden in the Dutch Republic, so that at least nominally soldiers and sailors joined the army, navy, and companies of their own volition. However, professional recruiters in collusion with innkeepers did make use of debt traps to cajole people into signing up. In popular parlance these intermediaries became known as *zielverkopers*, a play on words that combined the official meaning of 'seller of seals', after the documents used in recruitment, with the

Table 4.1 *The military labour market*

	c. 1600	c. 1625	c. 1650	c. 1675	c. 1700
Army	35,408	51,265	29,315	88,588	94,176
Navy: warfleets	8,000	8,500	11,000	20,000	20,000
Navy: shipyards					1,500
VOC: European soldiers		3,600		10,000	9,523
WIC: European soldiers			4,500		3,000

Sources: **Army:** H. L. Zwitter, *‘De militie van den staat’*. *Het leger van de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden*, Amsterdam, 1991, 175–6. Figures taken from ordinary and extraordinary war budget for the years 1599 (partial), 1621, and 1701. **Navy:** warfleets: estimates 1600, 1628, 1642: Jaap R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Columbia, SC, 2011, 49; estimates 1675 and 1700: Jaap R. Bruijn, ‘Dutch Maritime Industries and Maritime Employment in Early Modern Times’, in Robert Bohn (ed.), *Nordfriesische Seefahrer in der frühen Neuzeit*, Amsterdam, 1999, 111. **Navy:** shipyards: estimate on the basis of Pepijn Brandon, *War, Capital, and the Dutch State (1588–1795)*, Leiden, 2015, 170–5. **VOC:** 1625 and 1675: projections on the basis of Jan Lucassen, ‘A Multinational and Its Labor Force: The Dutch East India Company, 1595–1795’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 66 (2004), 15, and Femme Gaastra, “‘Sware continuerende lasten en groten ommeslagh”. Kosten van de oorlogsvoering van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie’, in Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (eds.), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, Leiden, 2002, 85; 1700: Gerrit Knaap, Henk den Heijer, and Michiel de Jong, *Oorlogen overzee. Militair optreden door compagnie en staat buiten Europa 1595–1814*, Amsterdam, 2015, 196–7. **WIC:** Rough estimates based on Knaap, Den Heijer and De Jong, *Oorlogen overzee*, 374–5.

secondary meaning of ‘seller of souls’. Once people had signed up as military workers, the law gave commanders far-reaching prerogatives over their lives, limbs, and labouring capacities, *de facto* and *de jure*, introducing important elements of bondage into the ‘free’ labour practices of the Dutch Republic.

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the number of people employed directly for military purposes by the army, navy, VOC, and WIC. After a century of incremental increase of the armed forces, in 1700 these four institutions together employed almost 130,000 men. Many thousands more were employed in subsidiary tasks as workers in the private arms and ship-building industries, as soldiers on armed merchant ships or as sailors on privateering ships. In 1703, the Zeeland towns Middelburg and Vlissingen alone equipped 47 privateering ships manned by a total of 6,667 sailors and soldiers.²⁰ Migrant labourers made up a large proportion of all these groups. For example, between 40 and 60 per cent of the soldiers fighting in the service of the Dutch state were recruited abroad. Nevertheless, making a rough estimate, by the end of the seventeenth century the proportion of the labour force of the Dutch Republic that was directly or indirectly engaged in war-related tasks may well have been as high as 7–10 per cent.

As a result of the reforms in army organization and especially the improvements in the payment system, open mutiny by soldiers in the States Army became relatively rare. However, in the navy and among Dutch soldiers and sailors in the West and East Indies, mutiny remained an important instrument in the military labourer's arsenal of resistance. The threat of mutiny in 1626 forced Vice-Admiral Adriaen Claesz to end his operations in the Caribbean and return to the Dutch Republic. Collective desertion and a mutiny in 1649 seriously hampered the WIC's attempts to hold on to Dutch Brazil. And in July 1688, underfed and overworked soldiers in Suriname killed Governor Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck. Mutineers took over Fort Zeelandia, but internal divisions among the soldiers led to the end of the rebellion after which eight instigators of the revolt were hanged, two were sentenced to be broken on the wheel, and sixty were banished from Suriname. In the Dutch Republic itself a string of refusals by crews of hired merchantmen to take to the sea in unfit ships under drunk and incompetent captains was one of the factors behind the shift towards a standing fleet in the aftermath of the First Anglo-Dutch War.

The most common form of resistance against military labour was not mutiny, but running away. In all early modern armies and navies desertion was endemic. The Dutch were no exception. In VOC settlements such as Surat and Bengal, the general annual desertion rate

lay around 5 per cent, and in Europe anywhere between 20–40 per cent of soldiers who left the States Army did so through desertion.²¹ Sometimes soldiers and sailors ran away from any kind of military employment; often they joined competing armies or navies in order to gain better working conditions or to retain the ‘hand money’ they had received for signing up. Outside Europe there are quite a number of known cases of deserters converting and living among indigenous tribes, joining pirate bands, or attempting to establish their own communities outside the reach of the authorities. Finding room for manoeuvre or escape routes from the straitjacket of military labour regimes was an integral part of life and work in the armed forces.

The Dutch Golden Age Through the Lens of War

While often viewed as a particularly non-war-oriented society, the Dutch Republic became one of the most effective wielders of global military force in the seventeenth century. War was a permanent feature of life in the Dutch Golden Age. Of course this does not mean everyone was affected by it in equal measure. During the Eighty Years’ War, rural populations in the southern and eastern provinces experienced the hardship of actual fighting much longer than did their urban counterparts in the north-west. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, the Dutch state proved it had managed to transform the motley bands of rebel troops into a professional army and navy which could challenge the Iberian adversary both on land and at sea. The creation of chartered companies for the East and West Indies with far-reaching prerogatives for waging war on their own behalf helped to carry the war across the oceans, to the detriment of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, indigenous populations, and Dutch soldiers and sailors who died in high proportions in battle or as a result of tropical diseases.

The social and human costs of the operations by the Dutch army, navy, and the chartered companies were considerable. However, for those at the helm of Dutch society, the particular form of organization of the state and its armed forces also provided much room for private gain. The States General had a structural preference for

arrangements in which private investors were involved directly in manufacturing arms, supplying the army and navy, providing short-term loans for troop payments, and carrying out other key logistical tasks. It unhesitatingly employed the army and navy to secure Dutch commercial interests. This combination made war into an instrument of and an important field for capital accumulation, tightly connected to the other main branches of the economy. After the end of the Eighty Years' War in 1648, the Dutch continued to wage war on a large scale, largely outside their own territory. In the wars against Louis XIV's France in the final quarter of the seventeenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth the Dutch army and navy reached their peak in size. With immense fortunes running through the wheels of war, and up to 10 per cent of the labouring population employed in some form of military labour or subsidiary tasks, military violence shaped the Dutch Golden Age in more profound ways than is often acknowledged.

Notes

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The Cult and Memory of War and Violence

If war was the sinew of early modern states, this was especially so in the Dutch Republic. In 1579, a number of the rebel provinces in the Netherlands had joined forces in the Union of Utrecht for the express purpose of waging war against their Habsburg overlords. When this war ended at last, with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, the option to disband the Union was mooted quite seriously, and it took a major political crisis and several years of soul searching and hard negotiation for the provinces to decide they would continue to collaborate.

Even so, no one knew whether the Dutch state could survive without constant war. During the Twelve Years' Truce of 1609–21, political tension had brought the seven provinces to the brink of civil war, and many feared that a peace would give free rein to the disagreements that were endemic in the Union and so lead to its collapse. As we have seen in Chapter 4, this fear proved unfounded not least because the United Provinces continued to be at war on one front or another until well into the eighteenth century. It was not just the key decision-makers in the Republic, especially the urban elites of Holland, who considered warfare necessary to protect their commercial interests; for some, war also created opportunities to obtain profit and status. Aristocratic families, especially the House of Orange-Nassau, built family fortunes and reputations on achievements in land war, while the – mostly non-aristocratic – naval commanders of the Republic could gain spectacular fame and rewards at sea. Many jobs lower on the social ladder also depended on the ongoing military campaigns.

Yet this was not the only reason why war played a major but also quite contradictory role in the self-image of the Dutch in the Golden Age. Because decision-making about war and peace was so devolved that

there were many stakeholders, there was wide interest and involvement in military matters among the urban elites of the Republic. Yet for the same reason matters of war and peace were often deeply contested and subject to public debate. Campaign plans had to be defined and decided on collectively; when campaigning the stadholders were accompanied by field deputies of the States General. From 1598, recurring debates on the merits of continuing the war with the Habsburgs led to fierce and emotional public discussion. After 1648, one of the most persistent flashpoints for political conflict in the Republic was the question of whether the States General should focus their spending on the navy, as commercial interests dictated, or on the land army. The latter position was defended by provinces that were more vulnerable to direct attack over land, and usually also by the stadholders and their supporters.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, since warfare had to be paid for, the Republic's taxpayers also had to be persuaded of its merits. To finance the wars, the Dutch paid far higher taxes than they had ever done in the days of the Habsburgs and had to shoulder a huge public debt. Their willingness to do so was partly sustained by relatively high wages and by the fact that most taxes were indirect, and therefore came to be factored into the expected cost of living. There were, moreover, also many small investors in the public debts. Yet the urgency of financing the war was also maintained by a steady stream of reminders in the public sphere that the wars in which the Dutch were involved were necessary, urgent, just, and glorious. These reminders were targeted at the tax-paying populations in the seven provinces, especially Holland.

In this need to justify war in the public eye, the Dutch Republic was not unique – even regimes which could rule in a much more 'absolute' manner than that of the United Provinces felt they had to expend considerable energy on the justification and glorification of war. The States-General imitated the policies of European princes in announcing national days of prayer, penance, or thanksgiving in support of military campaigns, by keeping and displaying the banners which their armies had seized from defeated enemies, and by minting medals in commemoration of great victories. Princes and republics alike rewarded poets who eulogized the achievements of armies and navies, and paid for the funerary monuments of military heroes. Yet more so than the subjects of most monarchs, or even those of a republic like Venice, the Dutch were exposed to mixed, and often also contradictory, messages about their military needs and achievements. They were not only

familiar with a discourse that highlighted and glamorized the glorious achievements of the Republic's army and navy. Side by side with this there emerged a discourse that centred on victimhood, sacrifice, and the glories that they brought. This chapter will discuss how these two coexisting discourses came into being and gained a prominent presence in the cultural landscape, before briefly turning to the silences surrounding war.

Victimhood

Long after becoming a major military power, the United Provinces liked to emphasize their smallness, their vulnerability, and the miraculous, and therefore also precarious, fact of the state's survival against the odds of a conflict with a much stronger enemy. The popularity of these tropes dated back to the early days of the Revolt, when the States General had to overcome the distaste for rebellion and disorder among their subjects and foreign rulers alike, so as to attract support or at least forbearance of both locals and European rulers. This was all the more important since they lacked other important sources of legitimacy, such as tradition and historical continuity. The rebels therefore chose to emphasize that theirs was a war of self-defence, not directed against their king, but against the tyranny of the 'evil counsellors' who had misled the monarch. This fiction was maintained until 1581, when the States General decided to abjure their overlord formally, so as to be able to appoint another prince in his stead. After the experiment with their new overlord failed, as did the governorship of the English earl of Leicester, it was only in 1588 that the States General declared that, from then on, they would rule themselves as a republic, a federation of seven sovereign provinces.

In making the case that they had the right to do so, leaders of the Revolt not only had to marshal legal and political arguments for the right to political resistance such as were also being developed in other parts of Europe, they also needed to persuade a wider audience of their plight. For this purpose, they could to some extent rely on a transnational politico-religious sensibility that had developed among Calvinist Europeans in the second half of the sixteenth century, and that had spread through the international circuits of exiles, nobles, and intellectuals who believed they were suffering and fighting for the same cause. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tales of the martyrdom of Protestants across Europe were collected in immensely influential martyrs' books, while

refugees were compared to the biblical people of Israel and their enemies to Pharaoh. Calvinist rebels liked to present themselves as the hapless victims of conspiracies instigated if not by the devil himself, then at least by his servants, such as the papacy, the Spanish Inquisition, the Jesuit order, and the Catholic Guise family, as well as the Spanish Habsburgs, who were seen to be striving for 'universal monarchy'. From the perspective of Reformed Europeans, this was a transnational, even cosmic, struggle, in which the godly suffered and fought side by side.

Although Calvinists did at times also think in national terms and might claim that God was an Englishman, or that the Dutch were a second Israel, they simultaneously cherished explicit transnational sentiments. This zeal did at times result in practical support. Just as William of Orange and his brother Louis of Nassau supported the French Huguenots against their Catholic opponents, many of the English and Scottish soldiers who came to fight in the Netherlands were motivated by zeal to further the cause of Reformed Protestantism. While Reformed rulers were often reluctant to offer support to co-religionists abroad, their subjects were often much more generous. Although the Republic offered very limited assistance to the Protestant princes fighting in the Thirty Years War, Dutch believers avidly followed the news about events in the Holy Roman Empire. Calvinists throughout seventeenth-century Europe enthusiastically collected huge sums of money for Reformed victims of Catholic violence in Ireland, the Palatinate, and the Valtelline. In the 1680s, the plight of the Huguenots in France, too, triggered outrage among Protestant Europeans.

This Reformed tradition was, however, of limited use to the political elite of the United Provinces, mainly because it was unsuitable for garnering the support of the large religious minorities within the Republic, some of whom had themselves been victim of Reformed aggression, and many of whom venerated martyrs and exiles of their own. Since they also needed the support of Catholics, Mennonites, and Lutherans, the rulers of the Dutch Republic could simply not afford to tie themselves too closely to an aggressively Reformed confessional agenda. In an attempt to develop a secular alternative, propagandists around William of Orange in the 1570s marshalled the support of non-Calvinists for the Revolt by framing it as a war between Netherlandish 'patriots' and evil foreigners, in which the people of the Netherlands were presented as victims of 'Spanish tyranny' rather than of Catholic oppression. Both propagandists for the Revolt and local communities found the trope of secular

martyrdom very suitable also to describe and lament the civilian victims of the Revolt, especially the women and children who were often described as the favourite targets of the Spanish 'wolves'. In hindsight, moreover, the notion that the Dutch were, collectively, victims of a war against a foreign enemy could be usefully deployed to overwrite memories of the terrible civic and religious strife that had characterized the early decades of the Revolt. Leiden's memory culture, for instance, foregrounded the burghers' heroic endurance of the famine during a Habsburg siege in 1574, celebrating it as a collective sacrifice by a united population, thus ignoring the deep divisions in the town.

At first, such war memories were evoked above all in local and provincial contexts. This changed when, around 1600, the new rulers of the war-weary Habsburg Netherlands, the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, first began to moot proposals for a peace between themselves, the king of Spain, and the rebel United Provinces. Within the Republic, many were appalled at the prospect of a peace. Since any peace agreement would require the Republic to give up its aim to conquer the southern provinces for the Reformed religion, it was especially opposed by the tens of thousands of Flemish and Brabant Reformed exiles in the north who hoped, one day, to be able to return to the Southern Netherlands. Many others had economic concerns – Zeeland's and parts of Holland's economy thrived on the Republic's blockade of Antwerp, or were investing in projects to compete with the Spanish and Portuguese empires overseas which would also have to be abandoned in return for peace.

From around 1600 and especially from 1607, pro-war campaigners in the Low Countries therefore began systematically to revive memories of the 1560s and 1570s, so as to argue that Spanish peace offers could not possibly be trusted. In ever more graphic terms, plays, songs, prints, and children's books evoked the bad old days of the 'Inquisition', the trials conducted by the 'Blood Council' of the 'Iron Duke' of Alba, and the punitive sackings of the Netherlandish cities in the 1570s. In such accounts there had been tens of thousands of victims in every town, blood gushing through the streets, mass rape, and massacres of women, children, and the elderly. Memories of the 1584 assassination of William of Orange by a Catholic Habsburg agent who had insinuated himself into the household by pretending to be a Calvinist refugee epitomized the dangers of trusting the 'Spanish' enemy. Even if it was commercial considerations that motivated much of the political opposition against the peace, it was this historical, moral take on the conflict that dominated public debate.

The rhetoric about Dutch innocence and vulnerability that was developed in the pamphlet war surrounding the peace talks of 1607–9 might have disappeared after the signing of the Twelve Years' Truce, had it not been for the fact that the architect of the truce, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, between 1610 and 1618 succeeded in making an enemy both of the orthodox wing of the Reformed Church and of Stadholder Maurice of Nassau. In the vicious public debates during the Truce, Oldenbarnevelt's religious and political enemies increasingly used his association with the peace talks to present him as a stooge of the Spanish, explaining how the Remonstrants and their leaders were crypto-Catholics and had by association, or even by choice, become agents of the Habsburg enemy. Counter-Remonstrants, by contrast, took it upon themselves to deliver 'wake-up calls' to those Dutch who had forgotten, or failed to remind their children of, the clear and present danger that the Spanish and the fifth column of their Remonstrant supporters were presenting.

By the time Maurice made his move to unseat Oldenbarnevelt in 1618 and had the old man arrested, tried, and executed, what had begun as the ad hoc rhetoric of the war party had developed into national, secular canon of Revolt memories, of a type that is more often associated with the nationalism of the 1800s. In books, verses, prints, songs, paintings, plays, and sermons, the Dutch reminded themselves again and again of the evil days of the wicked duke of Alba, the dangers of Spanish rule, and the providential role of the House of Orange-Nassau as deliverer from this danger. A popular children's version of the Republic's blood-curdling Revolt memories entitled *Mirror of Youth* argued that no one worth his name as a Netherlander should allow the past to be forgotten. The same book was described by its translators into French as a 'catechism of the state'.¹ Even at an Amsterdam fairground visitors were encouraged to behold and shudder at the spectacle of 'the Tyranny of Alba'.

By extension, this rhetoric also allowed the Dutch to see themselves in the role of 'liberators' of other victims of the Spanish. Campaigners for the founding of a West India Company (WIC) liked to compare the Dutch with the innocent 'Indians' who had fallen prey to Spanish cruelties in the New World and who were believed to be pining for liberation by the Dutch. It is no accident that in 1620 there appeared new, expensively illustrated companion volumes about the Spanish tyranny in the Netherlands, and its equivalent in the Indies.² In the 1620s and 1630s, the Dutch were to design costly overseas commercial projects predicated on the idea that, as fellow victims of the Spanish,

they would be welcomed as liberators by indigenous peoples in the New World.

In a Dutch context, the atrocity tales were revived in public debate whenever peace talks were proposed. Many contemporaries found it hard to imagine the nature of the conflict in any way other than the one that was shaped by the propaganda of the 1570s. After 1621 the news-flashes from the past were paired and compared with those emerging in the present. In this way contemporaries were encouraged to think about the history of the conflict in a way that suggested at the very least a *moral* continuity between the events of the 1570s and those of their own time. It helped sustain the willingness to pay for the war, but it also prolonged the war itself, because every time peace negotiations were on the cards in the 1630s and 1640s the decontextualized episodes from the past were used as evidence that militated against peace in the present.

Even after the war with the Habsburgs ended, interest in the atrocities of the Revolt did not recede – quite the opposite. The city of Oudewater, for instance, in 1650 commissioned a painting for its city hall that showed how the town had been taken and pillaged in 1575. The painting became a fixture in the annual commemoration of the ‘murder’ of the city that had commenced early in the seventeenth century. Every year, after hearing a sermon that recalled their plight and deliverance, the town’s citizens walked to the city hall, to hear and be shown the harrowing details of the events of 1575. The suffering of Oudewater was deemed so great that, early in the seventeenth century, the States of Holland had already granted a pension to all remaining survivors. Perhaps because of this, some of their stories remained well enough known for them to be retold as late as the 1660s, when the local grocer Adam Duin recorded them in his account of the massacre. An immensely popular play on the siege and relief of Leiden in 1575, which had been written by pastry cook Reynier Bontius in 1645, was reprinted 111 times before 1850 and performed every year in both Leiden and Amsterdam, as well as touring the countryside around Holland. It was accompanied by gruesome ‘spectacles’. As late as the 1770s, one Rotterdam gentleman reported the ‘most harrowing sight’ of seeing a ‘fire in which a Spaniard was about to throw a swaddled infant’ during one of these performances.³

It is no wonder that, even after 1648, Revolt memories were constantly remediated when new military crises erupted. During the Anglo-Dutch War of 1652–4 it was said that Orangist ministers promoted ‘for reason of state, from the pulpit, during meals, in barges and on carts to tell, yes for

children to learn at their mother's knee, that a hundred thousand were killed for the sake of religion, that the duke of Alba himself had prided himself on killing eighteen thousand ... it would well nigh be idolatry should one not believe it'. The French invasion of 1672–3 was also directly compared with the sufferings of the Revolt. 'I have often heard my parents talk', said one author, describing the massacres at Bodegraven and Zwammerdam, 'about the Spanish cruelties committed at Zutpen and Naarden at the beginning of the troubles, but this French torching, murder and rape outweighs all the cruelties of the Spanish' (see Figure 5.1).⁴ One publisher efficiently recycled an old account of Habsburg tyranny by simply substituting all references to Spanish and Spain in the text with French and France.

But it was not only during periods of foreign threats that such memories were rekindled; Oldenbarnevelt was only the first Dutch public figure to be accused of being a 'latter-day duke of Alba' – so were both Stadholder William II, for instance, and Pensionary Johan de Witt. In the course of the Golden Age, references to the Dutch sufferings of the early days of the Revolt had become central to their understanding of themselves, and a benchmark for good and evil. As one Reformed minister put



Figure 5.1 Anonymous, *The Massacre of Naarden*, c. 1615.

it in a sermon of thanksgiving for a victory in 1704: 'having crossed a red sea of an eighty years' long bloody war, we have been recognised by the Spanish monarch as a free people, and then liberated from the miseries that can be found in the Dutch histories'.⁵

Glory

Side by side with the boundless interest in Dutch suffering and Spanish atrocities, however, war was also present in a much more positive light. From the start, the Dutch rebels also celebrated their victories, their heroes, and their occasional heroines. Song, a medium of huge importance in sixteenth-century Europe, was one major medium in which this could be done. In 1570, the songs composed about individual issues and episodes of the Revolt were first collected in the *Beggars' Song Book* (*Geuzenliedboek*), which was to remain a bestseller throughout the Golden Age. With its contents placed in chronological order, the collection became a dynamic popular history of the conflict, and was constantly reissued and updated to include the latest triumphs. Often, it was the authorities who took the lead in celebrating achievements in war. The traditional way of involving the public in military triumphs was by proclaiming general processions in all cities of the kingdom, with *Te Deums* in the churches, which might be followed by public illuminations and the like. After the Reformation, *Te Deums* and religious processions were abolished, so this was obviously no longer an option. In the Dutch Republic, cities occasionally organized triumphal entries for visiting stadholders, but ritual thanksgiving was done mainly through sermons in the public church. There were, however, other well-established ways to publicize achievements in war, notably through imagery.

From the 1570s both cities and provinces spent large sums on commemorative war imagery; Alkmaar, for instance, commissioned large paintings of its siege, while the States of Zeeland commissioned four enormous tapestries representing the naval engagement of the early decades of the Revolt. Among the spectacular windows in Gouda's Sint Jan Church are two stained glass windows commemorating the siege of Leiden, one of them paid for by the city of Delft, which had played a major part in the operation to flood much of south Holland so as to enable a fleet of flat barges to sail to the besieged city. Yet there also emerged a tradition of heroizing the achievements of ordinary citizens: Kenau

Simonsdochter Hasselaar in Haarlem, who led the women of Haarlem during the defence of the city, is only the best-known of a range of local heroes and heroines whose achievements were collected in seventeenth-century books, and whose feats were immortalized locally in gable stones, small paintings, and the like. The carpenter who used his pole to cross the *polders* between besieged Alkmaar and Hoorn to take a message to the States, the man who rescued his elderly mother from Spanish troops in Westzaan, and the woman who helped demolish Vredenburg castle in Utrecht were all held up to urban audiences as civic role models, emphasizing that this was a war in which all burghers were stakeholders.

The States General were much slower to commission works of commemorative war art but, like local authorities, they commissioned medals which were widely used both to reward combatants and to commemorate victories. Medals were kept with pride, as is evident from their presence in portraits of the combatants who received them, and even in portraits of the children of those combatants; such medals also became collectors' items, which might be reissued at the anniversaries of major victories or other important events. The imagery on medals was often repeating that of the immensely popular news maps that were published from the 1570s. The Habsburg overlords of the Low Countries had been early users of the printing press as a medium to celebrate military and dynastic triumph, but in the Revolt it was no longer the authorities but print-makers themselves who took the initiative to publish war news. The famous print series of events in the Revolt that was produced in Cologne by the firm of the exiled Antwerp printer Frans Hogenberg and his successors was a commercial venture. Having first plagiarized a graphic history of the French wars of religion, Frans Hogenberg around 1570 began to create pictorial histories of the Dutch Revolt from prints that were topographically quite accurate and looked like (but had not always originated as) news prints and so carried an air of immediacy. While initially these also highlighted political events, massacres, and civilian suffering, from the late 1580s, the prints increasingly focused on the detailed mapping of episodes in the war, especially sieges, and soon other publishers began to compete with the Hogenbergs. Prints in this tradition prided themselves on immediacy and accuracy, closely mirroring the information in other media. Some of the artists and publishers involved, like Hogenberg himself, had trained as mapmakers, and many worked in close collaboration with surveyors and engineers in the States Armies.

It is hard to say who initiated such collaborations. Siege warfare was the rule during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Maurice and Frederick Henry specialized in waging it through careful, expensive engineering works, which were designed with mathematical precision. Maurice commissioned painted maps for his own use and, since we know he was keen to foster his reputation as a military innovator, he may have encouraged the spread of his innovation through the medium of news maps. From a military point of view these were more interesting, innovative, and relevant to publish than individual feats of heroism. That the artists and publishers were given help and the opportunity to work may be an indication that officers and commanders themselves also appreciated what the prints could do for their reputation.

Publishers could also expect to be rewarded by the States General or, especially initially, to be given patents. From the late 1590s, the States General seem to have realized the propaganda value of news maps. In 1597, they ordered a Jacques de Gheyn print of the Battle of Turnhout to be put on display in a public area of their quarters in the Binnenhof. Soon afterwards, they considered commissioning a series of prints celebrating the victories of the States Army as a way of impressing the king of France.

Yet the copper engravings that were increasingly used for such prints were so expensive a medium that we must assume that they were produced for a much bigger market. Perhaps buyers were found among the international corps of officers fighting on both sides as well as military professionals abroad. Others have suggested their relevance to many urban regents and investors who were keen to follow the progress of the campaigns. However that may be, it seems evident that at some stage news maps also captured the imagination of a bigger audience of buyers. When war resumed in the 1620s, news maps and news prints were produced routinely by publishers who were constantly checking what did and did not work in the ever growing market for news and commemorative publications.

At the same time, the States General and Stadholder Frederick Henry, too, began actively to participate in and to encourage the spread of news of the stadholder's triumphs. The taking of the tiny, but strategically important garrison town of Grol, now known as Groenlo, in 1627 was Frederick Henry's first major feat, a way to make up for Maurice's much-criticized failure to take the town twenty years earlier, as well as the first good military news after years of plague, economic disaster, and



Figure 5.2 Frans Bruynen, *Tandem Fit Surculus Arbor*, allegorical print, 1627.

political strife. The taking of Grol was therefore greeted with a wave of public rejoicing, a triumphal entry into The Hague, medals, prints, and poems to heroize the achievements of the prince of Orange (Figure 5.2). This set the tone for the great celebrations to follow in subsequent years, when the taking of Den Bosch and Maastricht were to definitively establish Frederick Henry's reputation as the *Stedendwinger* ('conqueror of cities'), and a match for that other great Protestant hero, King Gustav Adolfus of Sweden, who was lionized across Europe. After Frederick Henry's death, his widow Amalia van Solms sealed his posthumous reputation by the commissioning of the Oranjezaal ('Orange Hall'), where a range of the best Flemish and Dutch artists executed a stupendous ensemble of paintings to celebrate the military reputation of Frederick Henry and his family.

The standards set by Frederick Henry were not easy to match. One reason that Frederick Henry's son, William II, was so opposed to a peace with the Habsburgs was his awareness that an end to the conflict with Spain would rob him of an opportunity to emulate his father. For the military reputation of the House to be renewed, the

family had to wait for the elevation of William III to the position of captain-general and stadholder in 1672. Having been raised to his dignities by popular demand, William III was deeply aware of the importance of propaganda, and he spent considerable time and energy on managing his own reputation as a godly champion of liberty against the might of the French king Louis XIV, and a worthy descendant of the father of the fatherland, William of Orange. Artists such as Romeyn de Hooghe not only glorified the prince but also satirized his political opponents. Once Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and William III had been welcomed as the harbinger of a 'Glorious Revolution' to protect the English from popery and tyranny in 1688, the propaganda for the French wars took on a generically Protestant hue.

Although William had to overcome early conflicts with the Amsterdam regents, the continuous pursuit of the French wars caused virtually no public debate in the Republic. This may seem odd, considering the huge expense of the war, not to mention the scale and bloodiness of the conflict. Yet pamphlet debates regarding war and peace seem to have emerged in the Dutch Republic only when there was disagreement within and between the urban elites and other main players – recent scholarship has learned not to equate pamphlets with the 'voice of the people'. Scholars have identified other ways to access this voice. A recent study of thousands of 'lottery rhymes', the mottoes which ordinary citizens added to their lottery tickets and which were read out during the hour-long draws of the winning tickets, suggests that the writers, without being opposed to the wars as such, held distinct views about the motives and consequences of the wars. Showing almost no interest in the religious rhetoric that was central in the States General's propaganda for the wars, and quite aware of setbacks on which the propaganda press and newspapers were quiet, ordinary people were most interested in the economic issues at stake and increasingly keen on peace.

It would be a mistake, though, to think that it was only the States General and the stadholders who had a stake in the publicizing of war. The East and West India Companies, for instance, realized very well what war news could do to share prices. In the 1620s and 1630s the WIC, very much in need of political support, went out of its way to publicize its achievements, like the capture of the Spanish silver fleet by Piet Heyn in 1628. Piet Heyn received a hero's welcome in various Dutch cities, there were banquets and fireworks in his honour, and many

commemorative medals, prints, and poems were produced. A recent study of the publicity surrounding the conquests in Brazil has highlighted the extensive media campaign initiated by the WIC, the effect of which was amplified by the discovery of news-makers that news about Brazil sold well. Such public success could backfire; the consequence of promoting the conquests in Brazil as beneficial to everyone in the Republic was that discussions about the response to the loss of Brazil in the 1640s became very public and extremely acrimonious.

Other important stakeholders were the five Admiralties and their admirals and vice-admirals, from whose ranks came the naval heroes whose sumptuous tombs continue to adorn a range of the major churches in Holland. Like most other issues in the Republic, decisions about naval war were politically contested. This created an incentive for individual Admiralties, and for commanders, to appropriate victories and the enormous rewards these could bring, and to show this not only by commissioning many works of art and artefacts to commemorate the victories of their ships, but also by publicly honouring the men in their service. In this context, it is significant that explorer and vice-admiral Jacob van Heemskerck, who died during the Battle of Gibraltar in 1607, was honoured with a splendid funerary monument in Amsterdam several years before the States-General at last agreed to finance a monument for William of Orange.

Since towns and Admiralties often had different views on what the targets for joint action should be, there were sometimes acrimonious discussions about the merits of the various admirals and vice-admirals, which the stadholders and pensionaries could not always settle in private. Admiral Maarten Harpertz Tromp became a very wealthy man and was ennobled by the kings of both France and England, besides being immensely popular, yet a defeat enabled his old rival Witte de With, who supported the regime of Johan de Witt, to seize his chance and have the Orangist Tromp unseated as admiral. Often in disagreement with each other, and always in competition, the Admiralties worked hard to highlight the achievements of the ships and commanders under their auspices, but they also found a very enthusiastic audience for such forms of reputation management. Unlike most army officers, the naval heroes of the Republic were usually commoners, a factor that captured the imagination of the wider bourgeois public. Much more so than about officers in the land armies, the Dutch public devoured news about the lives, careers, and dictums of these naval heroes, whose personal

histories were indeed exciting, studded as they were with periods in captivity, narrow escapes, great personal sacrifices, and the adoration of the men serving them. Naval warfare also became a popular subject for paintings not only in public buildings, but also in private homes. Inns were named after naval battles and great commanders, and war memorabilia found a ready market.

Even those commoners who had never boarded a ship could to some extent share in the military reputation of their communities through their membership of the civic militia companies, which usually consisted of all able-bodied men who could afford their own equipment. Since the towns often had virtually no police force, and usually only few soldiers in garrison, the militias played a key role not only in securing the cities at night, but also in keeping the peace during episodes of internal disorder and riot. Very occasionally militiamen were sent out to support the war effort of the States Army, mostly for guard duty in strategic posts whose garrisons had had to go into battle; such feats were celebrated with the commissioning of commemorative prints and other memorabilia. Yet their local role was also considered to be very significant. Their officers frequently had themselves portrayed in their role as guards of civic peace, security and unity, most famously of course in Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. While the pacifist Mennonites could buy themselves out of militia duties, Catholics, Remonstrants, and Lutherans continued to serve, so also supporting a creditable claim to civic equality. Although in the past members of the militias have often been dismissed as rather self-important amateurs, recent scholarship has come to appreciate the militias' importance both as a vehicle for civic pride and during political crises. The early years of the Revolt against the Habsburgs had shown that town councils were powerless once they had lost the trust of (part of) the militias, and these were the natural vehicle for many an urban coup, when armed citizens took on the mantle of political authorities who were seen to have failed in their duties.

Acts of Oblivion

As noted above, the Dutch were able to overwrite memories of civil strife in the Revolt with memories of the heroic suffering of a united Dutch population under the onslaught of a Spanish enemy. This

process was much assisted by the oblivion clauses in the Pacification of Ghent of 1576, in which the provinces had agreed that all the events of the previous years would be forgotten. Such oblivion clauses, which were used as an instrument for peace-making across Europe, were not meant to suppress memories as such, but to deactivate them as triggers and justification for further violence, public recrimination, or lawsuits. In the Dutch context this meant, for instance, that Catholics could no longer be prosecuted for efforts to resist the Revolt. Conversely, the existence of certain war crimes by the rebels was acknowledged, but responsibility for them was assigned to individual scapegoats outside the civilian population. A good example of this is what happened to the reputation of Beggar commander Lumey, whose name is associated with the martyrdom of nineteen Franciscans from Gorinchem in 1572. Whereas Catholic accounts stressed that the population of Brielle had been laughing and jeering while the captured Franciscans were forced to walk the town in a mock procession and, in a parody of the sprinkling of holy water, had used brooms and buckets to bless them, the historian Pieter Bor and subsequent historians held only Lumey and his soldiers responsible. According to Bor, the episode in Brielle had happened 'to the great discontent and displeasure of the good citizens, who were horrified by such cruelty', and in disregard of instructions by William of Orange.⁶ Since Lumey had been dismissed in 1574 and had subsequently reconciled with the Catholic enemy, he was an ideal scapegoat, and his role was recalled with a view to demonstrating the virtues of Orange rather than to acknowledge the deep divisions within the Dutch population.

Later acts of war, too, were discussed and remembered very selectively. While army discipline improved rapidly and mutinies were rare in the States Armies after the 1580s, the inland provinces all remained vulnerable to attack, and fishermen and the sailors manning small merchant vessels were at constant risk of being imprisoned or killed. Even so, once people in Holland no longer had war on their territories, from 1578 they showed little interest in the plight of compatriots who had to live with the consequences of sustained warfare. The Republic's self-image might be built around a love of 'liberty', but contemporaries thought of this not as a generic human right, but as a specific set of rights and privileges that extended only to those who were 'represented' in the Provincial Estates. When deciding on

war aims, the interests of communities that were not represented in the States General counted for very little. People living in those parts of the Dutch Republic without representation in the States General, the frontier zones in the east and south, the conquered areas known as the Generality Lands, and peoples living in striking distance of the East and West India Companies, felt the burdens of war most acutely, yet no one showed any interest in their wishes. As we have seen, Frederick Henry's feats were greeted with waves of public praise, but in these celebrations local voices were conspicuously absent. While supporters of the West India Company continued to fantasize about the possibility of natural alliances between the Dutch and 'Indian' victims of Spanish tyranny, Dutch settlers waged war against native Americans. And while the extermination of virtually the entire population of the Banda Islands, in 1621, attracted criticism within Dutch East India Company (VOC) circles, it was only the first of a long range of vicious campaigns against Asian enemies, in which civilians were not spared. While defeated European enemies were given quarter, Asian enemies were routinely enslaved. It was rare for anyone in the Republic to ask publicly how violent a price the Dutch were entitled to exact for living in a Golden Age. Yet of course others were doing so for them. The makeshift legal procedure by which the VOC commanders in 1623 in Ambon executed ten Englishmen and nine Japanese soldiers who had allegedly plotted to take over Fort Victoria, for instance, caused outrage in England. After exonerating the judges at a subsequent enquiry in the Republic, the Republic considered the matter closed. Yet, in England, memories of the 'Amboyna Massacre' were rekindled until well into the eighteenth century and did much to fire animosity against the Dutch during the Anglo-Dutch Wars.

Conclusion

While reminders of war and atrocity were thus in abundance in the Republic's cultural landscape, warfare also came at a cost that remained hidden from the Dutch public sphere. War was central to the Dutch self-image, but the Dutch did not see themselves as warlike – to the contrary. The early history of the Revolt was rewritten as a story of victimhood and civic courage against foreign enemies, and so created a powerful founding

myth for the new state. On closer inspection, there were many voices missing from the din of publicity and discussion surrounding matters of war and peace, most notably the voices of those who had no representation in the States General. The consequences were serious, not only for their victims but also for the Dutch themselves. Policy-makers in the United Provinces were frequently deluded about how others viewed them and their motives, and had little understanding of what moved their enemies. Thus Maurice and the States General were genuinely surprised when Flemish peasants near Nieuwpoort did not welcome them as liberators during the 1600 campaign. Both the WIC and the VOC built castles in the air when thinking about securing local allies against their Iberian competitors in the New World. By 1650 the ruthlessness with which the Dutch pursued their self-proclaimed right to trade had become proverbial across Europe. Even so the Dutch habitually continued to think of themselves as vulnerable and small. As a consequence, they were genuinely surprised when, in 1672, a coalition between the kings of England and France and the prince-bishops of Cologne and Münster went on the attack, and even more so that their plight attracted little pity among the other European powers. That even Dutch foreign policy-makers found it hard to understand, let alone handle, the animosity which the United Provinces attracted as the seventeenth century progressed was the result of the cognitive dissonance between the self-image they had so usefully created and the political reality that others witnessed, that the Dutch Republic of the Golden Age was, also, an aggressive superstate.

Notes

1. Cited in J. Pollmann, *Het oorlogsverleden van de Gouden eeuw*, Leiden, 2008.
2. W. Cilleßen, 'Massaker in der niederländischen Erinnerungskultur. Die Bildwerdung der Schwarzen Legende', in C. Vogel (ed.), *Bilder des Schreckens. Die mediale Inszenierung von Massakern seit dem 16. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main, 2006, 93–135.
3. Cited in Anna de Haas, 'Gruwelen op het achttiende-eeuwse toneel. "Wij openden het gordijn van ons bebloet toneel"', *Literatuur* 19 (1995), 201.
4. Cited in J. Van der Steen, *Memory Wars in the Low Countries*, Leiden, 2016, 278.
5. Cited in Van der Steen, *Memory Wars*, 283.
6. P. C. Bor, *Vande Nederlantsche oorloghen, beroerten ende borgerlijke oneenicheyden, gheduerende den gouvernemente vanden hertoghe van Alba inde selve landen: warachtighe ende historische beschrijvinghe*, Utrecht, 1601, 121. The contrast was first noticed by my former student Leon Geutjes, who discussed it in a seminar paper in 2008.

Part III

Political Culture

The Body Politic

In the engraving *Prosperity of the Land* (1613), a multitude of ships are depicted, anchored in, entering, or leaving the port of Amsterdam.* At first sight it is a representation of wealth through commerce. However, the engraving is part of a popular genre of sea- and harbour-scapes that has clear allegorical meaning, relaying an image of combined strength and prosperity through unity. The ships carry flags of a province or a city, or the national tricolour, stressing the multi-layered nature of the United Provinces. An accompanying text connects commerce with civic identity, but also specifically with an emerging national consciousness.¹

This complex nature of the Dutch Republic, a compound state in which power was shared by the States General, the provinces, and the cities, has fascinated both contemporary observers and later historians. For the late seventeenth-century English diplomat William Temple, the United Provinces were ‘the envy of some, the fear of others, and the wonder of all their neighbours’. His contemporary Jonathan Swift, however, remarked that the Dutch Republic was ‘a commonwealth so crazily instituted’.² Nineteenth-century historians, notably Robert Fruin, often lauded the rise of the nation-state and regarded the decentralized United Provinces as an aberration. At the same time, Fruin acknowledged the value of a political system characterized by liberty and consensus through persuasion. This ambiguity has cast a long shadow on the historiography of the Dutch Republic.

* I would like to thank Charles-Edouard Levillain, Arjan Nobel, Gijs Rommelse, and Coen Wilders for commenting on drafts of this chapter. Needless to say I remain responsible for any shortcomings.

It is only in more recent decades that the political system of the Dutch Republic has been reappraised. Firstly, increasingly historians believe that it was precisely the decentralized nature of the Republic that made it such an effective state. Secondly, historians have become less interested in formal structures and institutions and more in political culture. A proper overview of the body politic must therefore pay attention to formal institutions and underlying power structures, but also to a culture of politics. In recent years the awareness that politics is essentially a discursive process has gained ground and has changed the focus of research. It has also led to a re-appraisal of static interpretations of the Dutch body politic in recovering the dynamic interaction between multiple political discourses. This notion is the central guideline for this chapter, which aims to understand the Dutch body politic as a constructed entity that was discursively reshaped continuously, leaving room for contesting narratives and identities. It will do so by analysing the structure of the body politic, the political process, and ideologies and identities.

Historical Background

Historians have been eager to stress Dutch exceptionalism, using terms such as 'enigma' and 'miracle' to describe the political, cultural, and economic success of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. At first glance this seems warranted. A decentralized state, emerging as if by accident in the late sixteenth century, admired for its achievements, must stand out in the midst of centralized kingdoms that went through periods of great political and economic turmoil. More recently, such comparisons have been presented in less stark contrast. For instance, the centripetal forces within the Dutch Republic, which lessened its decentralized character, have received more attention. At the same time, kingdoms such as France, which were traditionally presented as centralized and absolutist, were actually multi-layered in their political make-up. Nor is the compound nature of the Dutch Republic unique, as most of Europe constituted what historians now call dynastic conglomerates. This is not to say that the Dutch Republic was more normal than often thought, but rather that in the context of early modern Europe there was no norm, as each state was a unique composite.

The peculiar constitution of the Dutch Republic can be explained based on the country's chequered historical background. The seventeen

provinces of the Low Countries were incorporated gradually into the dynastic conglomerations of the Burgundians and the Habsburgs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The dukes of Burgundy created several institutions that were to facilitate the process of centralization for their territories. The provincial high courts served as executive offices, and a chamber of accounts dealt with financial matters, while each province was ruled by a stadholder on behalf of the absent duke. The States General infrequently met as an assembly representing all provinces. The Habsburgs added several councils and unified the provinces under Habsburg rule by the 1549 Pragmatic Sanction of Charles V. The Dutch Revolt left these institutions largely intact but changed their functions. In 1579 the Union of Utrecht was established, a defensive pact between several provinces, mostly in the north, against the Spanish army and in favour of religious freedom, but it was not until 1588 that the Raad van State (Council of State) definitively took executive control.

The events of the Dutch Revolt were closely intertwined with the development of a political ideology for the fledgling Republic. Early modern states did not have written constitutions but were guided by what contemporaries believed to be unwritten fundamental laws, such as the principle of hereditary succession in monarchies. The Union of Utrecht and the Act of Abjuration (1581) could be considered part of a cluster of foundational documents from which fundamental laws were deduced. The Union stipulated that the provinces act as one in their foreign policy, but maintain their provincial sovereignty. They would join to repel 'Spanish' troops and maintain freedom of religion. With the Abjuration, the rule of Philip II was replaced with that of the provinces, which represented the cities and localities as their constituents.

A Bottom-Up State

The Dutch Republic was therefore a bottom-up state. The great commercial cities were fiercely proud, building on traditions of self-regulation. The city councils were made up of *burgers* or *poorters* (citizens who had acquired the right to live within the gates of the city). From their numbers the magistracy was composed, consisting of one or more burgomasters and the magistrates. There were significant regional differences, and historians also speak of an eastern and a western model,

which are distinguished by the active role of the *meente*, a body representing a selected part of the burghers. Generally, in the eastern provinces, the council had a less active role than in the west. The countryside also showed a rich pattern of administrative bodies. The highest official was the bailiff, assisted by sheriffs, but there was also a proliferation of regulating bodies, such as the *heemraadschap*, a co-operative body for water management. The difference between the cities and the countryside was less stark than is often presented by historians. The countryside, just like the city, was marked by a dynamic political culture and administrative diversification.³

Variety was also characteristic on a provincial level. Each province had a very different composition and consisted of a variety of delegations of constituent members. In Holland and Zeeland, the assemblies were dominated by the cities. In Gelderland, Groningen, Utrecht, and Overijssel, there was a balance between representatives from the cities and from the countryside. In Friesland the countryside was dominant. Sovereignty was primarily vested in the provinces, and the provincial assemblies considered themselves more or less independent. The States General was essentially an assembly of delegates from the provinces. They were often required to confer with the provinces before voting on important matters, showing that provincial sovereignty often superseded national unity.

Still, the provinces did delegate power to the national level. The States General assumed responsibility for matters of war, foreign policy, taxation, and religion. The grand pensionary, who formally presided over Holland's delegates, acquired the status as *de facto* First Minister of state. Influence was primarily decided by the power of the purse, which was converted in the so-called *quotensysteem*, a key to distribute the level of annual federal taxes for each province. Holland paid the lion's share (58 per cent) and was often able to dominate the States General. This position was also spatially reproduced in the design of the Binnenhof in The Hague, in which the States General's meeting room was situated close to that of Holland.

Quarters in the Binnenhof were also allocated to the stadholder. Of all the offices of the Dutch Republic, his was the most peculiar. In Habsburg days, the stadholders dispensed royal authority in the provinces, but in the new Republic they were servants of the provincial States. Stadholders were usually appointed in more than one province, lending supra-provincial weight to the office. In practice, the princes of Orange were usually the stadholders in all of the provinces except for

Friesland and sometimes Groningen, which were reserved for the counts of Nassau. The stadholders combined their office with those of captain-general and admiral-general, making them chief military and naval commanders of the provinces. Thus, though servants of the provinces, through the accumulation of offices they could develop into quasi-monarchical unifying figures.

The princes were sovereigns of the principality in Orange, so that the Orange court had a dual function as a princely as well as stadholderly court. The princely court, modest in international perspective, was a social, cultural, and political centre in its own right. The stadholder typically worked through brokers, powerful local or provincial allies who managed his client network. In Utrecht, for instance, William III relied on the nobleman Godard Adriaan van Reede van Amerongen and the burgomaster's son Everard van Weede to supervise his affairs as patron and manage access. The Oranges and the Nassaus built up two parallel and separate client networks, a formal one as stadholders, and an informal one as princes and counts, adding to the complexity of the body politic.⁴

The diverging principles of union and provincial independence at the core of the new Republic's constitution left the issue of sovereignty unresolved. In theory the provinces delegated part of their authority to the States General. In practice, however, provincial sovereignty remained paramount. This was especially the case for Holland, which was able to stand alone against the other six. These six were disunited, but on certain issues they banded together, sometimes under the leadership of the stadholder, to stem the gravitational forces of decentralization and counterbalance the power of Holland. In the crisis of 1618 this constitutional conundrum engendered conflict when Holland insisted on provincial sovereignty in matters of religion, and the other provinces called for a national synod. The defeat of Holland in 1618 signified a temporary ascendancy for federal unity, but for most of the time, and certainly after 1650, the dominance of provincial sovereignty remained an axiom.

Political Process

A mere analysis of formal structures and institutions does no justice to the practice of politics in the Dutch Republic. This is because the precise

jurisdiction of offices and institutions was never crystal-clear, because of the lack of a proper constitution, but also because of the clout of informal authority and networks. The stadholder was officially subservient to the provincial assemblies, but with his wealth, power, and prestige he could exert considerable pressure through his personal patronage network. Likewise, the grand pensionary was officially a secretary. But he was also the official spokesman of Holland's nobility, chaired Holland's delegation to the States General, and sat on several committees. He dominated diplomatic correspondence and was *de facto* secretary of foreign affairs. As such, the stadholder and the grand pensionary emerged as the two leading figures in the political landscape, precisely because of the hybrid construct of formal and informal influence they acquired.

Policy-making was often successful precisely when it was conducted informally. One way that the elaborate process of formal decision-making could be circumvented was by shifting it to the preliminary stage, institutionalized in the committee system. To facilitate swift decision-making, the States assemblies established several committees to study and advise on complex issues. In the States General, likewise, informal power was channelled through committees, such as the committee for foreign affairs, which was highly influential, especially under Frederick Henry. After 1674, a standing committee for foreign affairs of the States General discussed important matters. The committee consisted of influential representatives of all provinces and thus had the necessary authority to carry its decisions through in the assembly. Committees essentially institutionalized the informal power of core groups of influential regents, ensuring swift and efficient decision-making.⁵

The most notorious example of the power of informal decision-making, in which even these committees were completely bypassed, was the Dutch invasion of England in October 1688, which initiated the Glorious Revolution. It was conceived in utter secret in April 1688 by Stadholder William III, a few of his favourites, and Grand Pensionary Gaspar Fagel. The plan was for troops to depart from fortresses and head to the port of Hellevoetsluis, where a fleet was assembled, ready to carry an army to England. As stadholder, captain-general, and admiral-general, William was able to initiate and supervise this process himself. It was only in June that the basis for support was widened by drawing in the burgomasters of Amsterdam in secretive talks, rather than going

through official channels. Only in September 1688 did the States General officially support William. Although the concentration of power in William's hands in 1688 was exceptional, the process of building up informal coalitions before bringing a matter into official assemblies was typical.

Except for the stadholders and a few nobles, the Dutch Republic was essentially ruled by patricians. They were known as regents, an ambiguous term signifying a social, economic, and political group that, however, lacked coherence, although they were recruited exclusively from the higher echelons and economic top layers of society. The regent typically had his power base in the city where he held a local office. It has been estimated that all of the political offices in the Dutch Republic were shared by around 2,000 regents, always bearing in mind that it was not unusual to combine offices.⁶ During the early decades of the Dutch Republic, a ruling class emerged from the wealthy merchants who earned their fortune in the booming overseas trade and rose to public office. However, a regent was never defined solely by economic power, but also by family ties, religious persuasion, friendship, and political acumen. The welding of established political experience with newly created commercial wealth led to a relatively enclosed new socio-economic elite that formed the regent class. A case in point is Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt, scion of a Dordrecht regent family that can be traced back to well before the Dutch Revolt. He married Wendela Bicker, daughter of a rich Amsterdam merchant, and granddaughter to one of the founders of the East India Company. By the middle of the seventeenth century, social mobility came to a grinding halt as the established regent classes closed ranks to new members. An 'aristocratization' of the ruling classes set in, as regents withdrew from active commerce and retired to landed estates.⁷

Political Communication

The Dutch Republic was a republic but not a democracy. Nevertheless, several administrative practices at least suggest a level of proto-democratization. Local politics was partly steered by popular demand through requests by locals, shifting the initiative for law-making to burghers. Another way for burghers to exert influence was through lobbying, usually through interest groups at a provincial or national

level. Burghers could also present petitions for specific political issues. People were able to articulate concerns, through riots but also through verbal and written communication. The local militias in particular were highly politicized corporations which could exert strong pressure on city councils, as indeed happened in the revolutions of 1672 and 1747. Local regents might dismiss popular pressure in theory, but remained sensitive to criticism.

Since politics is discourse, communication is at the heart of the political process. The most common way for the regents to communicate with the public was through placards, official statutes which were printed and distributed. Declarations by the States General or provincial States formed a significant part of the circulation of pamphlets in the Dutch Republic. Between 1650 and 1672, roughly a quarter of pamphlets were published by the authorities.⁸ This also means that, on an annual basis, dozens, sometimes hundreds, of pamphlets were published, often discussing current political affairs. Although historians disagree as to whether this constituted something like 'public opinion', clearly there was a readership that was being politicized. More sweepingly, David Zaret sees the 'origins of democratic culture' in the rise of public opinion in seventeenth-century England, which developed not unlike that in the Dutch Republic.⁹

All in all, it seems fair to suggest that a large percentage of the population was kept abreast of current political affairs, albeit perhaps superficially. Pamphlets passed from hand to hand several times, whereas the strong oral tradition ensured a further circulation of opinions. Next to the polemic pamphlets was another source for information, the newspapers and news books. The *Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant*, the oldest continuous newspaper, was established by Abraham Casteleyn in 1656 and was soon followed by newspapers in Utrecht and Amsterdam. Newspapers were affordable, but contained almost exclusively foreign news. Of more importance for domestic politics were the more expensive newsbooks which started to appear in the second half of the seventeenth century. Abraham's brother, Pieter Casteleyn, took the initiative in 1650 to publish the *Hollantsche Mercurius*, a voluminous overview of annual events based on printed documents which were collated by an editor. In 1690 a similar initiative was launched, the *Europische Mercurius*, mainly focusing on the wars against France. For reasons unclear to historians, the volume of pamphlets dramatically reduced after the turn of the eighteenth century.

Whether this was due to a decrease in interest, general consensus, or increasing government pressure on publications is unclear.

The International Stage

For the young Republic it was essential to assert itself on the international stage. Formally, it was not until 1648 that the Dutch Republic was recognized as a fully independent state, but the 1596 alliance with England and France could be interpreted as a first *de facto* recognition. The Twelve Years' Truce with Spain in 1609 signified one step closer to full international recognition. In the highly formalized international relations, the Dutch Republic was allotted the rank just under the Republic of Venice. The States General appropriated the title 'High Mightinesses', but it took an effort to have it internationally recognized; Spain did not do so until 1729.

International hierarchy was, however, not fixed, but a malleable construct. A case in point is a metaphor often employed by English pamphleteers, in which the Dutch Republic was equated with a burgher and England with a nobleman so as to suggest an hierarchical relationship. The metaphor was highly effective and tied in to social composition of the diplomatic services, in which Dutch diplomats were often of the bourgeoisie rather than the nobility. Likewise, diplomatic discourse often employed the language of age and seniority to the disadvantage of the young Dutch Republic. Dutch authors contested these constructions in flagrant dissent from the established international hierarchy. An example is a book by Carel Allard, *Nieuwe Hollandsche Scheepsbouw* (1695), in which he describes the flags of the seafaring nations. Allard acknowledges the precedence of the king of England, but consciously places the Dutch Republic well in front of the Kingdoms of France and Spain by reason of its naval superiority. Indeed, through military, naval, and financial capacity Dutch diplomacy acquired leverage to renegotiate its place in the international hierarchy.

The conduct of foreign policy reflected the myriad complexity of the compound state that was the Dutch Republic. The States General was represented by ambassadors in the main capitals of Europe, but it was not unusual for cities and provinces to conduct a foreign policy independent of that of the States General, even if the practice was controversial. In 1705, for example, in the midst of the War of the Spanish

Succession, the city of Amsterdam more or less independently negotiated with a French agent. Consuls represented trade interests and Dutch citizens abroad, but usually also took care of their private commercial interests. In embassy chapels, ministers played their part in official diplomacy but also maintained transnational confessional relations. Loosely attached to the official diplomatic service was a diffuse group of agents, spies, merchants, personal confidants, newsagents, and even art dealers who were constantly seeking to affect international relations.

Extra-European relations were established and maintained through commercial companies. These were never fully independent, but operated through an *octrooi* (charter) from the States General. However, they acquired semi-sovereignty and were authorized to declare war, make peace, and conclude alliances within their sphere of influence. For the East India Company (VOC) this was Asia, for the West India Company (WIC) the Americas and Africa's west coast. The Heeren XVII (VOC) and Heeren XIX (WIC) formed the Boards of Directors of the two largest commercial companies. Each board consisted of several chambers in which the most important participating cities were represented. As such, the VOC and the WIC also reflected the compound character of the Dutch Republic. With an eye on distance and communication problems, governance of the VOC was delegated to Batavia (modern Jakarta), where the governor general ruled together with the Council of the Indies. They were responsible for policy decisions but remained accountable to the Heeren XVII. The WIC operated within a similar structure, but a major difference between the two organizations was the lack of an administrative centre in the west. A representative of the States General took a seat in Heeren XIX, testimony to the integration of the two commercial companies in the governmental structure of the Dutch Republic.

The VOC mainly operated through *factorijen*, local merchant settlements ruled by a governor but within the territory of Asian rulers. But the VOC also acquired territory, such as the island of Formosa (Taiwan), which was occupied for several decades and ruled by a governor. Such governors were appointed by the governor-general in Batavia, the administrative centre of the VOC empire. In Asia, the Dutch held an indistinct position. When a merchant settlement was established, relations with princes were usually marked by parity or even inferiority. For instance, in Japan, Dutch ambassadors performed *kowtow*, the ritual of

kneeling before the emperor with the head touching the ground. At the other extreme was Formosa, where the Dutch acquired sovereignty during the middle of the seventeenth century. Much more than in Europe itself, the diplomatic service unofficially consisted of merchants, rather than formal ambassadors, who tried to make inroads into local markets.¹⁰ The WIC was in a different position altogether. Territorial control was more limited and frequently unsuccessful in the long run. The territorial colonies of Brazil and New Netherland only lasted several decades, and the focus shifted to small island entrepôts such as Curaçao, a profitable commercial hub for the slave trade.

The nature of Dutch extra-European expansion has been debated, interpretations fluctuating between a commercial and a military-territorial enterprise. The haphazard structure of overseas expansion and the delegation of power to various commercial companies has caused many Dutch historians to deny it the epithet 'empire' altogether.¹¹ This seems a rash conclusion, inspired by an overly institutional approach and monolithic conception of empire. The patchwork of overseas possessions and interests could be reconceptualized as a network empire, in which myriad connections and multiple regional centres formed the constituent parts. Moreover, in the perception of rival states and commercial companies, the existence of a Dutch empire was never questioned, witness for example English Restoration politicians who were wary of Dutch universal commercial dominion.¹² Whether the empire was actually Dutch is questionable, given the multi-national character of the Companies' populations.

Political Ideology

In a country dominated by cities, local politics was paramount. This was dominated by factions, political alliances forged by families but also by groups of families who agreed to maintain and divide power among themselves. This they did through written agreements to divide vacancies for office equally. Different factions could establish some sort of balance of power as offices were distributed by rotation. On many issues, factions had no specific ideology or political programme, and they were not dependent on an electorate. They simply were part of the political elite intent on maintaining power for themselves, their families, and their political allies.

However, ideology certainly played a role in Dutch politics, even if there were no well-organized parties. In times of national crisis, an accumulation of local groups of regents could form something that might resemble a national party. Traditionally, historians distinguished two national parties in Dutch politics. Orangists supported the princes of Orange as stadholders and natural leaders of the Dutch Republic. They represented the monarchical element in the mixed constitution of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. They also symbolized national unity and military leadership. They gained support among the landlocked provinces. Republicanism, contrariwise, lauded the aristocratic republican leadership and represented the maritime interest and particularistic tendencies. It reached its apogee in the period of True Freedom (1650–72), the stadholderless period, and gained most support in the province of Holland.

While this monolithic view of national parties is no longer tenable, the revisionist emphasis on local interest also seems off the mark. Families had interests but could also be carriers of political ideologies. For instance, the De Witt families and the Huygens families passed on their respective republican and Orangist ideologies through the generations. Moreover, factions were building blocks of parties and could acquire an ideological character when supra-local issues were at stake. During the troubles in 1618–19 an accumulation of local factions formed temporary alliances of an ideological and confessional character. This does not mean that the political landscape was dominated by national organized parties, but it does mean that partisan issues could be vehemently defended by temporary coalitions of factions. Neither the traditional image of two national ideological parties nor the revisionist image of non-ideological factions is very satisfactory; rather, the political landscape of the Dutch Republic was a multifarious patchwork of local, regional, and national actors, whose self-interest and ideology were often intertwined.

This ties in with recent insights that politics is essentially a discursive practice, rendering the revisionist distinction between ‘interest’ and ‘ideology’ problematic. Revisionists believed that the traditional image of two ideological parties was naive, arguing instead that local factions focused on self-interest. However, in political discourse material interest and ideals are seamlessly intertwined and cannot be separated. The reconceptualization of politics as a discursive rather than social phenomenon has significant implications which historians are

still exploring. Revisionist historians focused mainly on organizational structures, discussing whether partisan or factional groups could be distinguished. More recently, historians have focused more on the role of political language. The lack of formal structures for parties did not stifle the influence of partisan language by Orangists and republicans, and indeed may have intensified it. Despite the fact that party structures were only rudimentary, political discourse on, for instance, foreign policy had an innate tendency to mould itself along partisan lines.¹³

Having said this, political discourse was not exclusively based on party ideology at all. The Year of Disaster, 1672, for instance, witnessed a multi-faceted outburst of public debate. At one level, discussion clustered around the traditional Orangist–republican axis, in which William III and Johan de Witt figured as the main actors. At a completely different level, however, debates bypassed this dichotomy by focusing on issues of citizenship and political participation. Yet another facet of the debate had a more distinct confessional character, linking national politics and culture to the Reformed identity of the Dutch Republic. Lastly, a rather unexplored dimension of the 1672 debates is the way in which the Dutch renegotiated their place within the international hierarchy in response to the charges in the English and French declarations of war that the Dutch Republic was a usurping state that had to be humiliated.

For a young Republic with no apparent unity, discourse on the nature of the body politic and Dutch identity was of paramount importance. The conceptual metaphors that were employed to represent that identity were not just illustrative; they shaped modes of thinking and political discourse and thus, in a way, moulded and remoulded the body politic.¹⁴ A case in point is the representation of the Dutch Republic as a body that had to be kept healthy and vital. As such, corruption and treason became tropes well integrated into partisan discourse. In the whole of early modern Europe there was a long-standing literature on the vices of ‘evil counsellors’, targeting princely favourites in particular. In 1672 De Witt was murdered out of anger over his foreign policy which, it was widely believed, was responsible for the disastrous French invasion. The charge was that, by allowing libertarianism and lax religion, he had corrupted and ultimately betrayed the body politic. The symbolic retribution was his lynching and the ritual mutilation of his body, which was not the result of blind rage but a conscious act of political symbolism. His body was mutilated, just as De Witt was

believed to have mutilated the body politic of the Dutch Republic. Hence De Witt's finger, which had signed the Perpetual Edict barring William III from office, was cut off. The body politic could therefore function well only if it was healthy. In political discourse, the metaphor of the body was often used in conjunction with a nomenclature that denoted its state of health. In the wave of protest against the republican and liberal regime in 1672, for instance, one Orangist pamphleteer suggested the stadholder as a *Medicin for Holland's illness*.¹⁵

A body could function well only if corruption did not set in. What precisely encompassed corruption in the early modern context is not so clear, since there was no clear divide between the public and the private spheres.¹⁶ In general, it was accepted that gifts circulated and money changed hands, but there were also activities that were off-limits, such as the selling of offices or state secrets. Crossing these lines was regarded as treason or corruption. *Griffier* Cornelis Musch and the First Noble of Zeeland, Willem Adriaan van Nassau-Odijk, for instance, were notorious for selling offices and secrets. The charge of corruption or treason could not always be proven, and indeed was sometimes wholly fabricated, as was the case with Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Johan de Witt. The point, however, was not so much that corruption defied some well-described bureaucratic code, but that it was a metaphor for a disease in the body of state and was often turned to partisan ends.

Identity

For a young compound state, the development of a sense of national identity took place in the context of strong local and regional self-awareness. The profound experience of the Dutch Revolt became the benchmark for Dutch national identity. An important concept was 'patriot', appropriated in partisan as well as in local, regional, and national contexts. The concept was as multivalent as 'Fatherland', which could refer to the Dutch Republic as a whole, but also to local or provincial ties.¹⁷ The centrality of these concepts is testimony to the ongoing need to construct identities. The greatest challenge, in the light of the chequered history of the United Provinces, was to define a national ideology, something to bind together the provinces through the power of ideology and common interest, which institutions alone could not do. The notion of

a nation forged by the Dutch Revolt was powerfully supported by massive historiographies of the events by Pieter Hooft and Pieter Bor, literary monuments that legitimated the Revolt and fostered a sense of common destiny.

Likewise, images and symbols helped in visualizing the Dutch national body politic and lending it legitimacy. Several national political metaphors rivalled each other. One popular image was that of the 'Garden of Holland'. Throughout the first decades of the seventeenth century the image of an enclosed garden, sheltering seven virgins and guarded by the Dutch lion, became a favoured topic for engravers. Such images embodied the ideal of a small but unified state, one encircled by dangerous predators. A popular but more elitist ideology was that of the Batavian myth. The Batavian revolt against the Romans in the first century AD was seen as an event foreshadowing the Dutch Revolt. Hugo Grotius argued that it supported the case for provincial sovereignty, and the myth gained support mostly in Holland, rather than in the Dutch Republic as a whole. Another influential image was that of the Second Israel, the theological notion that God had favoured the Dutch Republic, just as he had Old Testament Israel. He had done so for the state to shelter the Reformed true church and would continue to do so as long as the Dutch remained united and held fast to their faith. The metaphor was immensely powerful because it conveyed a sense of purpose, but was also limited because of its claim to exclusivity. Moreover, it had a strong transnational character, binding Dutch Protestants to foreign co-religionists rather than the state. All of these metaphors coexisted; there was never one dominant or monolithic Dutch identity.

Conclusion

The body politic of the Dutch Republic was a multi-faceted entity, with local, regional, national, and global dimensions. The political culture of the Dutch Republic and the mentality of its citizens were rooted in the medieval history of the Low Countries, in which the provinces were relatively independent and there was a high degree of local self-regulation. It was also rooted in the history of the Dutch Revolt, which developed a powerful ideology of religious freedom and representative institutions. And it was rooted in the global experiment, in

which trading companies had to define their relationship with foreign rulers.

As a whole, the body politic of the Dutch Republic was marked by complexity and paradox. Although local and provincial independence was hailed, there was also a strong sense of national loyalty in the face of international crises. Although there was a joint effort to expand outside Europe, the Dutch empire remained a chequered phenomenon. Although there was a complex formal constitutional structure, there was also an important informal circuit. There were rival conceptions of national identity, and rival interpretations of the locus of sovereignty. There was a time when historians baulked at the seemingly disordered nature of the Dutch Republic, which fell far short of the ideal of a developing nation-state. Nowadays, the Dutch body politic is instead hailed for its pragmatic, flexible, and conflict-avoiding institutions and decision-making mechanisms.

This complex and paradoxical nature of the Dutch Republic has been the subject of fierce debates by its citizens in the past, as well as by later historians. Rather than validating one interpretation over another, it seems prudent to appreciate the identity of the Dutch Republic as fluent and multi-faceted, as continuously discursively shaped and reshaped. The engraving *Prosperity of the Land*, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter captures this constructed and multi-faceted identity of the Dutch Republic in all its complexity.

Notes

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Popular Participation and Public Debate

One thing that struck foreign observers of the Dutch Republic was the outspokenness of common people in political and religious matters. 'Almost every man is a statesman', wrote an English visitor in the early seventeenth century, '[and] the point of government, from the highest to the lowest, may be learned in a passage boat going from one town to another, as well as in the assembly of the General States.' Later in the century, William Temple similarly remarked on 'the strange freedom that all men took in boats and inns, of talking openly upon all public affairs, both of their own state and their neighbours'.¹

This remarkable degree of popular involvement with matters of state and church, and the openness with which they were debated on the streets, in barges, in inns, and in print, has ever since been treated as a vital aspect of Dutch society in the Golden Age and is firmly associated with its presumed modernity. In their book *1650: Hard-Won Unity*, Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies coined the term 'discussion culture' as the core characteristic of Dutch society at the time. This society, they argued, was fundamentally shaped by the negotiation, consultation, and debate that were required to reach political decisions in a federal Republic. The direly felt need for harmony within and between the provinces created a widely shared respect for the opinion of others along with a fundamental obligation to acknowledge and discuss those opinions in all layers of society.²

The concept of a discussion culture has proved a fruitful one, tying together various domains in Dutch seventeenth-century culture. The discussions in the barges that were the fastest and most convenient form of group transport for persons of all stations to which the English observers referred; the remarkable rise of the political press in this

period; the deliberative operations of the States General and provincial States assemblies; the discursive nature of Dutch Reformed Protestantism, with its emphasis on resolving matters of faith in synodal discussion; the disputations organized by universities and Chambers of Rhetoric throughout the country; the relative freedom of speech and low-profile censorship and the ease with which subversive, libertine, and heterodox books could be published: all these aspects in various spheres of society do indeed betray both an insatiable lust to exchange and debate opinions, as well as a predisposition to give space to those exchanges.

On the other hand, the term 'discussion', which connotes polite exchange and negotiation, seems rather too friendly for the harsh realities of Dutch public debate. Emphasizing the penchant for consensus and the spirit of respect for the opinion of others, and putting much weight on the freedom of speech that made open discussion possible, Frijhoff and Spies' account of the Golden Age perhaps suited the beliefs and ideals of their own time better than those of the seventeenth century. Later historians have painted a more cynical picture. Michel Reinders' book on public debate in 1672, the Year of Disaster, perhaps offers the most striking contrast. Reinders argued that political print played a crucial part in creating public hostility towards Johan and Cornelis de Witt, the brothers who had led the Republic during the stadholderless period. As a result, they were infamously torn to pieces and cannibalized by the mob in The Hague. Since some of the demonization of the brothers in print had been condoned and even actively encouraged by their political enemies, the Orangists, Reinders' account not only highlights the violence that could attend public debate, but also the manipulation it could be subject to.³

The broad participation in politics suggested both by the English observers and by Frijhoff and Spies has also been challenged. Craig Harline, in his book on Dutch pamphlets, has noted that the impression was shaped more by the contrast with foreign countries than by the realities of the Dutch Republic. Indeed, even in the seventeenth century, Dutch authors nuanced observations such as Temple's by stressing that 'the common people have no part in important deliberations' and that only foreigners from 'condescending monarchical states' would think so.⁴ Talk and debate did not and still do not necessarily mean participation or even only proper discussion.

Nor was debate as open and open-minded as the term 'discussion culture' suggests. Entire groups were in practice excluded from public

debate. Only very rarely, for instance, did women break the social barriers that prevented them from voicing their political or religious opinions or ideas. Moreover, opinion in the Dutch Republic was often deeply polarized, and people of various beliefs (both political and religious) were frequently so entrenched in their views that 'discussion' amounted to little more than repeating the same arguments and stereotypes over and over. Political commentators such as Vondel, but also theologians such as Arminius and Balthasar Bekker, and philosophers and freethinkers such as Spinoza and Enricus Walten, experienced firsthand that the freedom to publish their thoughts could unleash hostile powers that often gained the upper hand. The poor Spinozist Adriaen Koerbagh, who publicly denied all the main tenets of Christianity, died miserably in the Rasphuis. Repression, slander, and satire could easily trump argumentation, but they also shaped discussions and were just as much a consequence of the plurality of interests that made up the Dutch state as deliberation and tolerance.

This chapter seeks to probe the scope and the limits of the culture of debate and popular participation in politics, and to establish a middle ground between Frijhoff and Spies' positive discussion culture and the more cynical and eerily modern-like media culture described by scholars such as Reinders. In which ways was popular participation in politics possible, and what was the role of the media and public opinion in political and religious life? To answer these questions, this chapter will begin by tracing the origins of Dutch discussion culture in the Dutch Revolt. It was this troubled period that created the conditions and the sometimes contradictory ideals that shaped and limited popular participation and debate in the Golden Age in revealing ways.

Origins in the Revolt

The Dutch Republic was the first, and possibly the only, state born out of a pamphlet war. Even before the troubles in the Low Countries started, in 1566, public debate in print had exploded. Luther's Reformation had sent tidal waves of pamphlets emanating from Wittenberg and other Protestant print centres in Germany, which helped generate a heated public debate. Rhetoricians played a crucial role in this process. From the earliest beginnings of the Reformation in the Low Countries

onwards, the Chambers of Rhetoric became hotbeds of religious discussion and polemic. Already in the 1520s, poems mocking the Catholic Church and its rites were heard publicly in Amsterdam and Hoorn. As the situation became more tense, in the 1540s, such publications and performances became more frequent, their tone ever sharper, and government action against them more pronounced. Yet while Protestant literature was banned, evangelical poets continued to be full members of their Chambers and continued to agitate against the government. According to Pieter Cornelisz Hooft, writing one hundred years later, the 'rhymes of the rhetoricians' had done much for the success of the Reformation in these regions. With their distribution and performances of both satires of the Catholic Church and solemn poetry, the rhetoricians and their 'sharp tongues' had, according to Hooft and others, been a tremendous force against 'popery'. Of course, there were also rhetoricians who opposed the Reformation, such as the famous Antwerp poet Anna Bijns, the exceptional female rhetorician who, supported by monks of the Franciscan order as well as the authority of her 'innocent' femininity, wrote and published vehement and virtuoso anti-Lutheran verses. Yet the fact that the duke of Alba suspended the activities of the Chambers upon his arrival in the Low Countries indicates that Hooft and other seventeenth-century northern publicists were probably right in their assessment that most supported the Reformation. At the very least they had helped to 'mentally prepare' their audience for the Revolt.⁵

Partly due to the closure of the Chambers, pamphleteering exploded after Alba's arrival. Much rebel propaganda was now distributed in printed pamphlets. The legitimization of such subversive literature was rooted in the religious debates on the Reformation. This can be seen, for instance, in the work of the Antwerp Calvinist minister Franciscus Junius. Junius' diary shows him to be extremely sensitive to the need to publish and widely circulate the rebels' points of view, a sensitivity he acquired during the religious tensions of the mid 1560s. In his *Brief Discours Sent to Philip II*, which he wrote and published in 1566, Junius emphasized the importance of persuasion rather than force in matters of religion, and argued that only public debate could lead to the victory of truth. As long as truth was contested, freedom of religious debate was the only way to sustain the peace.⁶ Due to Alba's repression, the rebels became ideologically committed to free speech (albeit with some important limitations), a commitment some would later regret. But it was in

the spirit of Junius that the Republic would remain averse to the suppression of religious and political literature.

The government in Brussels, which answered to the king of Spain, did not agree. Junius was present in the audience when a price was put on his head soon after the publication of his pamphlet. From that moment onwards, he was a hunted man. The authorities even had a painter infiltrate his Reformed community so that they would be able to circulate his image and arrest him. He fled to Breda, where he was warmly received at the Nassau court, and developed into one of William of Orange's most important propagandists.⁷ Throughout the first decades of the Revolt, the government in Brussels declined to engage in public debate, instead answering the rebels' challenges in print with bans, proclamations, and public spectacles.⁸ This authoritarian reflex, as we shall see, was also part of the Dutch inheritance, and various Dutch politicians would tend towards it.

Despite the efforts of the government in Brussels to suppress political print and religious debate, the rebels successfully used print to gain the support of both foreign and domestic audiences. Many texts published during the Revolt were meant for international distribution. William of Orange and his propaganda masters, including Marnix of St Aldegonde and Jacob van Wesembeecke, especially targeted political assemblies. In France, they used Huguenot networks to reach decision-makers; in Germany, the Reformed networks of the Nassau family. Junius' *Brief discours*, too, travelled through these circles. Written in French, it was translated into German in order to be circulated among the princes assembled at the Reichstag in Augsburg. Yet it was also translated into Dutch for circulation in the divided Low Countries themselves. Even the famous rebel song, the 'Wilhelmus of Nassou', the current national anthem of the Netherlands, has international origins. Recent research suggests it was probably written by a man, Petrus Datheen, who had witnessed the siege of Chartres, in France, and heard its appealing melody there. The oldest existing printed version of the song is a German text, meant to acquire support among Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire. Yet the 'Wilhelmus' is also very much a Dutch song: its style and form resembling rhetoricians' poetry, it is perhaps not surprising that it had the greatest success in the Low Countries themselves, where it became a signal melody for the rebels and was printed in numerous versions. It is one of those sixteenth-century texts that acquired great symbolic value and remained ubiquitous in the seventeenth-century Republic.

The market for political print was greatly stimulated by the civil war that the Revolt was. New audiences for political print, at home but also abroad, were reached that had not been reached before. A wide range of customers now craved news and opinions in the vernacular. Whether one sympathized with the rebels, the loyalists, or neither, it was perfectly clear that the fate of the provinces, north and south, depended on the outcome of the many battles that were waged on and off the field, and printed information about them was valuable for many. But the changes were as much a matter of supply as they were of demand. As the Revolt progressed, the urban print centres of the Southern Netherlands, foremost Antwerp, put their weight behind the rebel cause and turned out a wide variety of printed texts in its favour. New presses were established in towns that joined the rebellion, such as Middelburg, in order to bolster the new regime with propaganda. Authors applied their rhetorical and literary skills to support the party of their choice in newly popular genres such as the dialogue or satiric verse. While many pamphleteers, such as Junius, were connected to the rebel leaders, the Revolt expanded the base of authors willing and able to meddle in political matters through printed publications. Translators were employed, and printers' networks established, for the circulation of propaganda abroad, and engravers, too, became ever more adept in delivering affordable high-quality political images for both domestic and foreign audiences. The Revolt thus helped to shape the supra-regional infrastructure for political print.

Many of those in this new business who exchanged Antwerp for the relative safety of Emden, Cologne, or London (from where they continued to disseminate their work) would later establish themselves in the new metropolis of print, Amsterdam. The culture of public debate and political print developed during the Revolt was thus carried quite literally into the new state that took shape north of the Scheldt. The heritage of the Revolt had major consequences for Dutch attitudes towards public debate on various levels and deeply affected the possibilities for popular participation.

Participation and Its Limits

As a movement, the Revolt could succeed only with wide popular support, which was considered vital to sustain rebel armies with men and money and to defend its cities. This led to a greater participation in

politics than elsewhere. Relative to its population size, more people were involved in political decision-making in the new Dutch Republic than in most other polities in Europe, and even more than in modern democracies. As Chapter 1 has illustrated, the Dutch Republic was the most urbanized country in early modern Europe (as much as 42 per cent of the population of the province of Holland lived in towns). When urban elites took the national government into their own hands, their deputies in the provincial States and the States General remained closely tied to the towns, and could not vote without the consent of the town magistrates. Thus a relatively large group of around 2,000 men decided on the course of state. Given that these men themselves were dependent on the support of their local factions in the towns, this meant that an unusually large percentage of the population had access to information on matters of state and were able to influence those in charge of it.

To be sure, the regent class that emerged triumphant from the Dutch Revolt was far from being ideologically predisposed to share power with the wider citizenry. It sought to monopolize power for itself, and shield that power from popular influence. Offices came to circulate among regent factions and, as the century progressed, civic leaders increasingly viewed themselves as aristocrats whose rule was just as absolute and God-given as that of the kings of France and England. Yet in the complicated balance of power that was the Dutch Republic, city councils could ill afford to lose the tacit support of the property-owning burghers and their corporations. In times of war, and the Dutch Republic from its inception until the end of the War of the Spanish Succession (1713) was nearly perpetually at war, the tax burden was unfailingly high (ironically much higher than the duke of Alba's taxes that had helped to ignite the Revolt). If the citizenry was to continue to bear that burden, they needed to be convinced that the wars were worth their sacrifices and that the country was in safe hands.

The Revolt had made everybody aware that a rebellion of discontented subjects might actually work. 'The people began with rebellion, the people will end with rebellion', Johannes Uytenbogaert prophesied in 1629, when he observed another pamphlet war in the Dutch Republic. 'God grant that this prophecy will not come to pass, for if it does, the people will cause . . . their own ruin.' For Uytenbogaert, court preacher to Maurice of Orange and a friend of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, obedience was the common man's lot. Yet he also realized that the common man needed to be appeased if the government was not to be overthrown

as it had been during the Revolt. Within limits, regents were therefore prepared to lend an ear to their citizens' grievances.

As in neighbouring kingdoms, petitions were the customary and formal way for citizens to affect civic government. In the Dutch Republic, the right to petition was silently acknowledged for both men and women in all levels of government, on the local, provincial, and federal levels. If citizens or corporations such as guilds wanted something done or changed, standardized, deferential formulas allowed them to address their government, which was then obliged to respond in similarly standardized terms. The success rate of petitions was staggering, estimates being that no fewer than 75 per cent of the petitions to the Amsterdam burgomasters, sheriff, and aldermen were granted. In this way, burghers could indeed influence the government in certain matters, although the range of subjects on which they could interfere was in practice strictly limited to their own direct interests.⁹

When formal supplications failed, people could of course also affect their government in informal ways. The approachability of Dutch leaders is an important backdrop here, which sets them apart from monarchies such as France and England with a strong aristocracy. In their local communities, everybody was aware of who the leaders were and where they lived, and usually they did not have extra protection. Even the formidable Johan de Witt walked through The Hague unguarded. Although riots were scarce in the seventeenth century, this did render regents vulnerable to popular pressure. When bread prices rose and the population was stirred up by preachers or competing politicians, they could be threatened, their windows smashed, or their houses plundered, which did occasionally happen. In very exceptional circumstances, the 'rabble', as the lower classes were commonly called by their social superiors, might even rebel against their government. In 1653, when the war against England was going badly, food was expensive, and Orangist agitation was becoming ever stronger against the stadholderless regime, riots occurred throughout the country. Rioters in Enkhuizen even evicted their magistrates and occupied the town hall. While this 'revolt' was only short-lived, it reminded the regents that Uytenbogaert's fears were not unfounded: a public that had rebelled against the government in Brussels could rebel again. In 1672, popular hostility towards the regents grew even stronger, and the authorities in various cities were forced to grant all the demands made by their angry subjects. The year 1672 was an exceptional one, but

the threat of popular uprisings forced the authorities to at least pay attention to public opinion. If the people seemed to have become discontented, and their demands were reasonable, regents were inclined to listen. Print could help force regents' hands, because it was generally assumed that pamphlets could incite the people to become unruly. And pamphlets were omnipresent in the Republic.

The Media Landscape

At the dawn of the Golden Age, in the early seventeenth century, the book market in the northern provinces underwent a spectacular development as more and more (mostly Protestant) professionals were encouraged by the stabilizing frontier and the demand for printers to move to the cities of the United Provinces. Here they helped, for instance, to sustain the war effort by printing propaganda, war news, and histories; to publish maps for seafarers; and to print learned works for the university in Leiden, which had been established in 1575 and was growing quickly. In Amsterdam, the book market exploded. In 1578, when the Catholic city defected to the Revolt, it had housed only a handful of booksellers. In 1609, their number had grown to thirty. Only twelve years later, more than fifty booksellers populated the city. By mid century, the book trade had expanded to such an extent that a sizeable share of all the books published in Europe was now produced in the once insignificant backwater.

Amidst a wide range of books on numerous topics, the new bookshops in this new centre of print also offered an expanding range of topical, printed media that would gain an ever more prominent role in society. Firstly, of course, there were the pamphlets, incidental publications, mostly in quarto size, and usually with a limited amount of pages, which discussed topical issues. Called 'blue books' in contemporary parlance (or, when offensive, 'libels') these booklets were the prime printed medium for news and opinions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Broadside publications of one leaf, carrying engravings or topical poems, had also been around for decades and could contain biting comments on current affairs. Engravings especially had a great appeal, both at home and abroad, and many satirical engravings were discussed both on the streets and in the highest levels of government. Prominent engravers, such as Romeyn de Hooghe in the later

seventeenth century, came to play a vital role in creating the official propaganda images for the government. Both pamphlets and broadsides were becoming more readily available and influential in the Golden Age, their quality and currency steadily increasing. Pamphlets were frequently distributed for free by interested parties, and broadsides were often posted in public places. Some, such as the 'Op de Waegschael' discussed below, became very famous and continued to have a powerful effect on public opinion for years.

In 1618, two Amsterdam publishers, Caspar van Hilten and Broer Jansz, initiated a new medium that would become extremely successful and spread throughout the Dutch Republic. This was the *coranto*, a weekly publication of one sheet of densely printed paper which contained a factual account of recent occurrences, mostly from abroad. Although hardly recognizable as such, these were the first newspapers, bringing hard news on a regular basis to an expanding audience. Adapted from manuscript newsletters meant for an elite readership, the new medium eventually succeeded in reaching a wide middle-class and even lower-class readership, which craved the information it offered, despite the fact that this consisted mostly of dry facts on far-away conflicts.¹⁰ There was, by the third decade of the seventeenth century, a widely shared sense that the European wars were all connected, and faraway developments could in a globalizing world be extremely relevant not only to politicians and merchants, but also to the common people who sought to understand their time and age, and knew that the fate of their country might well be decided on the battlefield in Hungary or Bohemia, in a courtroom in Vienna, or on the other side of the world, where silver ships and spice islands could be won or lost to determine the lives of many.

Of course, printed texts were not necessarily the major source of information for most people. Oral discussions were still important sources for many, especially those on the countryside and in the smaller towns and villages. Yet the intricate infrastructure of the Dutch Republic ensured that the contents of the printed media could reach far and wide into country, even if they were initially circulated in only one town. In the first place, the barges on which so many discussions allegedly took place were also efficient ways to transport goods, including books, from one town to another. Booksellers in different towns maintained close contact with each other and sold each other's work. Resident booksellers also co-operated with pedlars to cater for the

countryside.¹¹ The Amsterdam newspapers could therefore be read throughout the country in the 1620s, as could pamphlets and broadsides. Although information in this age seldom travelled faster than a horse, news that arrived in The Hague was known in Friesland and Groningen in a matter of days.

It was not only in the barges where people would discuss matters of state and religion. Certain public places in cities were specifically suited for the discussion of politics and religion and were hotbeds of debate on political print. Due to Jürgen Habermas' paradigmatic book on the bourgeois public sphere, coffee houses have become iconic of the kind of locales in which civilized, middle-class men might read their newspaper and discuss politics and the news. While Amsterdam was the centre of the coffee trade for decades in the later seventeenth century, the first Dutch coffee house opened its doors only in 1663, however. Before that, bookshops are often mentioned in contemporary sources as places where men would not only read the news, but also debate it (see Figure 13.2). The Bourse and Dam Square in Amsterdam, and the Binnenhof in The Hague, were also places where printed pamphlets were regularly circulated, read out loud, or posted, and other towns had similar places. Print, then, functioned in a predominantly oral world, but it penetrated widely.

Both the growing market for topical print and the rise of the newspaper were directly linked to the Dutch Revolt. The market for pamphlets and newspapers had been created by the constant stream of news produced by the tense military action of the late sixteenth century. The three-year siege of Ostend between 1601 and 1604 was only one of the prominent episodes that developed into an international media event. Some of the people active in the coverage of such events were to become the big names of the Amsterdam industry for news and topical print, including Claes Jansz Visscher and Broer Jansz. These were people who had been close to the war effort and saw their business thrive as a result of it. Government control of such energetic entrepreneurs in political news and opinion was, in the meantime, lagging far behind.

Faulty Censorship

Like any other early modern government, Dutch authorities of course sought to control the thriving new press, but with little success. This

was partly caused by a lack of will and partly by the decentralization of the government of the Dutch Republic. Both were yet again part of the inheritance of the Revolt, which made the repression of seditious texts very difficult.

Since the United Provinces were in fact a federation of sovereign states, there was no central authority that had the power to regulate the press. Preventive censorship that existed in other countries (including the Southern Netherlands) was completely absent: the Dutch Republic did not have a system for controlling the content of texts before they were published, and no attempts were ever made to set such a system up. Here, too, the history of the Revolt had shaped Dutch mentalities: the legacy of the Inquisition, and the well-nourished Dutch self-image as its principled opponent, had made preventive censorship extremely difficult to justify. The spirit of Junius and like-minded figures who had suffered for their pleas for tolerance during the 1560s was still very much alive. Whenever book burnings occurred in other countries, or religious intolerance on either side of the confessional divide seemed to be on the ascendant, memories of the repression of Protestant books and the regular book burnings in the sixteenth century were activated, and the spectre of the Inquisition invoked.

Pragmatic reasons also restrained the authorities' response to libel and diverging opinions. As the seventeenth century progressed, the economic advantages of a relatively liberal book market became ever clearer, which convinced some regents, especially in Amsterdam, that it should not be impeded too much. Moreover, shrewd politicians such as Johan de Witt were not blind to the fact that a ban often produced only more attention for a book than silent neglect. Indeed, some of the most avidly read books were banned books, and in most circumstances De Witt was right not to pursue the authoritarian course. All this did not prohibit decisive action in some cases, but it did frequently help printers, publishers, and authors to escape harsh punishment.

Censorship did exist, but that was repressive censorship, which took place after a book had been published and found offensive or dangerous. This, too, was more lax than in most other countries, but this was not due to a principled adherence to tolerance, but rather to practical problems of enforcement. Especially when international relations were at stake, but also on domestic issues, authorities regularly issued bans to stop the printing and distribution of certain subversive or controversial

books. Investigations into 'libellous' books could be intense and lead to the seizure of books and severe punishments for the author or the printer. Because censorship was enforced locally, however, this system was severely flawed and frequently failed to produce the desired result. Local authorities often simply neglected to pursue a book, out of a lack of resolve, or because they actually supported its contents. Since the country was often divided, religiously and politically, even banned texts could be published with relative ease simply by moving production to a more favourable city. When the divisions were serious, as during the Truce conflicts in 1616–19, in the wake of the siege of Amsterdam in 1650, or during the Year of Disaster in 1672, the conflicts of interest between elites ensured that subversive political print could be published without constraints. Printers who were prohibited to print what they wanted in one place could simply pick up their press and move elsewhere.

The (dys)functioning of censorship indicates that the fact that sovereignty in the Dutch Republic was located in the cities had a major influence on the ways in which public debate was structured and curtailed. It also shows that the patronage and protection of local authorities were vital to those who tried to publish texts to manipulate opinion, be it in print, manuscript, or public performance. It was the most formidable magistrates of the cities who, to a considerable extent, shaped what could be said in public because they had so many clients. We can see this very clearly in the career of an author such as Jan Vos, who established himself as city poet and director of the theatre in Amsterdam by consistently supporting the policies of his patrons in the Amsterdam magistracy, in his case most notably the tremendously rich and powerful Joan Huydecoper. Yet even Vos needed to be careful and anticipate changes in the local balance of power.

There were, of course, numerous opportunities for the anonymous publication of texts critical of the authorities. Printers frequently used false imprints to conceal a risky publication's provenance, and authors could publish their texts anonymously or use pseudonyms, mottoes, or initials to conceal their authorship. Yet the risk of an investigation was always present, and several printers were discovered and punished despite having used a false imprint. In many cities, perhaps excluding the metropolis of Amsterdam, it was very difficult to keep the identity of the maker of a publication secret. Although the extensive pamphlet archive gives the impression of

a lively and inclusive political and religious debate, middle-class printers and authors would think twice before they risked their livelihood and reputation by publishing texts that went against the government. Donald Haks has shown that most people who opposed the War of the Spanish Succession in the later seventeenth century did not dare to publish their opinion for fear of becoming social and political outcasts.¹²

Self-censorship therefore played a much more important role in the Dutch Republic than is often recognized and also helps to explain why the central government did not do more to keep unwanted books from circulating. This was most obvious in the newspapers that appeared from 1618 onwards. Since newspaper publishers relied on the recognizability and periodicity of their title, they could not afford to make enemies in high places. Both the early newspapers, by Broer Jansz and Caspar van Hilten, were anxious not to give offence to the authorities, who saw little need to interfere in their businesses as long as they published only factual reports on mainly foreign news. Yet even foreign news needed to be treated with extreme caution, since foreign dignitaries, too, were avid newspaper readers and sought to control their contents. Even a minor slight to a foreign ruler might lead that country's representatives in the Dutch Republic to file official complaints or even deliver personal threats. This is what happened to the most influential newspaper publisher of the Dutch Republic – the mogul *avant la lettre* Abraham Casteleyn, whose critical reports on the king of England in 1678 provoked the ire of the English ambassador. After the ambassador's visit, Casteleyn quickly changed his tune. He could not afford to risk his reputation or imperil his thriving enterprise. Hierarchy mattered and was respected by those who had much to lose.

Given the flaws in the system of censorship, it functioned remarkably well most of the time. While considerable freedom existed for the publication of religious heterodoxies and scientific speculation compared to other countries, politically subversive material was actually quite rare during quiet years. Only when the elites were at odds with each other could critiques of government and libel suddenly get out into the open and involve large parts of the population. Various unresolved tensions within the state ensured that such outbursts of publicity, or 'temporary public spheres', as Asa Briggs and Peter Burke have called them, occurred with great regularity.¹³

The Not-So-United Provinces

The history of the Revolt had created a supply and a demand for news and opinions that did not disappear when war ceased. As soon as the pressure of war fell away, the relentless militant activity and relative freedom of the political press became liabilities as much as assets. While at war, the Dutch could ill afford to quarrel among themselves; yet differences there were, and conflicts were simmering both on the local and on the national levels. In 1606, political disagreements over the Truce negotiations with Spain spilled over into public debate, and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt's policy was publicly under fire. While the Truce was concluded nevertheless, in 1609, the incident showed that the Revolt had opened a Pandora's box of public opinion. When tensions resurfaced during the Truce period, it appeared that this box could not be closed. A violent pamphlet war brought the young state to the brink of civil war in the first decade of its existence.

'Every man now desires to make books', a student in Leiden remarked when the troubles escalated in 1616, 'especially on matters spiritual. Persons of all sorts, learned and unlearned, burghers and peasants, engage in debate, and give the printers work.'¹⁴ The student clearly recognized the perilous effect which the lack of censorship and restraint now brought about. Public debate for him implied unruliness. He was not alone in deploring this development.

The threat of a Habsburg invasion played an important role in the discourse against public discussion. A letter written by the great scholar Justus Lipsius in 1595 was reprinted whenever public debate flared up. In this so-called *Sendtbrief* Lipsius had recommended the king of Spain to conclude a truce with the rebels, arguing that they would return to the Habsburg fold soon enough because their internal conflicts would get the better of them.¹⁵ This advice, which was widely published, served as a warning throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. Thus one pamphleteer claimed, in 1616, that the dissension among the Dutch was part of Philip II's strategy to regain the Northern Netherlands, explicitly invoking Lipsius. The pamphleteer's argument that Spain had introduced 'diverse opinions' in the Dutch Republic 'in order to stir up internal discord'¹⁶ reflected a suspicion held by many.

More principled, authoritarian arguments were also advanced. Some argued that 'the populace and the rabble' should not be allowed 'to advance every manner of seditious proposals and open violence', simply

because it was not their place to do so. Those who did 'openly publish seditious, bloodthirsty writings' deserved to be harshly punished.¹⁷ None of these complainers (mostly Remonstrants) was entirely devoid of hypocrisy: while lamenting the irresponsible behaviour of their fellow citizens, they took sides in the very debate they had just decried. They thought they had no alternative, however. The power of the printed word was considered so great that one could not let one's opponent's texts go unanswered even if one disagreed with debating in public in principle. At various points in the seventeenth century, especially in the crisis years 1616, 1650, and 1672, this dynamic would be repeated.

At three major crises in the short history of the Dutch Republic, pamphlet wars escalated into violence that disrupted the state. In 1619, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was executed in The Hague after years of ever more vitriolic public attacks on his person. In 1650, William II led the army to besiege the city of Amsterdam and break the opposition of Holland to his foreign policy. The episode was attended by a stream of pamphlets, which grew into a deluge when he died of smallpox three months after his putsch. In 1672, as has been noted above, the demonization of the De Witt brothers in popular print led to their assassination in The Hague. When we speak about a discussion culture, we should always remember that this was also a culture of defamation. Polemics and eruptions of violence were never far off in the Not-So-United Provinces, as Leslie Price has memorably called them, only muted by the carefully sustained public awareness that foreign threats required a certain degree of unity to prevail.

Amidst all the drama and turbulence of the seventeenth century, the main disputes that set the public sphere ablaze were in fact remarkably constant. Firstly, there was the issue of war and peace. In the first half of the century, debate on this issue naturally focused on the war with Spain. The negotiations for the Truce of 1609, from 1606 onwards, were accompanied by a clash in pamphlets between proponents and opponents in which the opponents had the upper hand, but lost the political battle. Later negotiations, whether to extend the Truce (in 1621) or to arrive at a permanent peace (in 1629–32 and again from 1641 onwards) also provoked heavily publicized public disputes, in which voices opposing the peace were loudly heard, and arguments for and against tended to be highly repetitive. One of the most consistent arguments against the peace was the deep-rooted distrust of the

Habsburgs, and the fear that a peace would only serve to allow the united House of Austria (the king of Spain and the emperor) to regain its feet and continue its mission to extinguish Protestantism and establish a universal monarchy – a fear that had already been encouraged by William of Orange's propaganda in the Dutch Revolt. Once that fear had lost its potency due to the Peace of Westphalia, the unmistakable decline of Spanish power, and the rise of France, Dutch publicists were quick to apply the same anti-imperial rhetoric to Louis XIV. From the 1670s to the 1710s, the power of the Dutch press was used not only to blacken the Sun King throughout Europe, but also to promote war against him.

A second constant source of tension was the position of the prince of Orange vis-à-vis the States of Holland. The three great crises of the century, of 1618–19, 1650 and 1672, each revolved around a conflict between the stadholder and the States of Holland, which simmered on during the intervening periods and rekindled in the 1680s. The interests of the two parties differed greatly. While the States controlled the financial might of Holland, and generally prioritized the naval economy and the navy that was protecting it, the princes of Orange were in charge of the army. Their interest was the glory of their house, and the waging of war, which led them to defend army expenditure and promote warfare on land. There was also a difference in style and support. While the States were generally backed by most cities of Holland and the great merchants, the stadholder's power base was the inland provinces, the aristocracy, and the lower classes. The descendants of the propaganda master William the Silent were well aware that they relied on popular support, and they used art and print to reach out to the general public. Thus, when William II attacked Amsterdam, he commissioned the printer Breeckevelt to print a false contract that implicated the city. The States, on the other hand, were much more reticent in appealing to the populace. They published decrees and preferred to refrain from appealing to public sentiment in domestic issues. Only in the case of utter necessity, in 1654, did Johan de Witt publish a *Deduction* to justify the actions of the State of Holland. Instead of being a polemical text such as those published by his adversaries, the *Deduction* was a long, argumentative text in juridical language that spoke only to the minds of the elite.

A third cause for instability and public debate was the religious tensions within the Dutch Republic. Not so much the tensions between Catholics and Protestants, as one might expect, but primarily those

within the Dutch Reformed Church caused most outrage. The greatest public debates of the century were waged between those favouring a more moderate Protestantism which was tolerant of private behaviour and willing to live side by side with Catholicism in Europe, and the strict, orthodox Calvinists who were Puritans in private matters and adherents of the militant international Calvinism that prepared for an apocalyptic battle against papism. While Protestants devoted much energy to the unification of Protestantism, and the unity of the Dutch Church was deemed to be vital to the strength of the country, this much-discussed ideal was never realized, and public polemics erupted at regular intervals.

Of course, there were many interconnections between, and variations within, these three long-lasting disputes. Political and religious tensions were deeply entangled, as were domestic and international conflicts, which ensured that debates were constantly evolving. For our purposes here, it suffices to note that there were structural tensions built into the state and the church that were never quite resolved, and ensured fluctuating but never-ending public debates, leading to outbursts of printed publications and public anger. In the language and the imagery used in these debates, the power of Dutch literature and rhetoric came to full expression.

The Power of the Word

Despite the phenomenal legacy of Dutch visual culture, society in the Golden Age was very much devoted to the word. The most prominent opinion-formers in the Dutch Republic were, perhaps unsurprisingly, preachers. Empowered by the Revolt, Calvinist ministers had a strong tendency towards politics and were not afraid to oppose the government in matters that concerned the well-being, as they understood it, of the Dutch Reformed Church and international Protestantism. It has often been suggested that preachers were also prolific pamphlet writers, a suggestion which rests not only on the known occupations of authors, but also on their style. Reading the news through the lens of the Bible, preachers considered themselves the religious conscience of the Republic and felt it their duty to publish accordingly. But even without print, they were guaranteed to have the ear of their congregations every week and used their verbal powers to imprint their values on them.

A second group of opinion-formers gradually gained in prominence in the seventeenth century. These were poets, who were devoted not to the church, but to the polis. The perceived importance of the Chambers of Rhetoric in the Revolt shows the exceptional political power that was attributed to literature in the Dutch Republic. Hooft's praise for the effects of their rhymes and performances says just as much about his ideas about the role of literature in his own time as in the past. Indeed, throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, literary texts were considered to be especially suitable for political persuasion. This conviction was mostly inspired by classical wisdom. Aristotle's assertion in the *Poetics* that an artfully arranged representation of reality was the most efficient way to affect human bodies and to access their emotions was held in high regard. Rhetorical tracts by Cicero and Quintilianus, whose work had been rediscovered by the fifteenth-century humanist Poggio Bracciolini, similarly asserted that persuasion was a form of art that could be mastered only by the committed study of literature. The study of rhetoric, which in the Low Countries had traditionally been institutionalized in Chambers of Rhetoric, and was pursued with more rigour and intellectual authority at the new university in Leiden, held that the artful arrangement of texts was crucial to their persuasive efficacy.

As a result of the centrality of literary theory and practices to the urban polities of the Low Countries, public political debate in the Dutch Republic was permeated by literary texts, mentalities, and modes of thinking. One glance at the extensive Dutch pamphlet archives suffices to show the prominence of literary forms: songs, dialogues, poems, closet dramas – there were few literary genres that were not deployed for political and religious persuasion. While the role of the Chambers of Rhetoric declined in the bigger towns over the course of the century, poets retained the status of opinion-makers that they had acquired during the Revolt. Frequently patronized by civic authorities who sought to counterbalance the traditional sway over public opinion held by the church and the stadholder, they helped to shape the major conflicts of the seventeenth century.

Amsterdam's poet laureate, Joost van den Vondel, was arguably the most important among them. Throughout his long career, which spanned almost the entirety of the Dutch Golden Age, Vondel made it his business to comment on the religious and political developments in his city, his province, his country, and Europe at large. Thrust into the

limelight after the Truce, when he defended Oldenbarnevelt and violently attacked the Counter-Remonstrants, Vondel was respected even by his ideological opponents for the power of his language and was generally expected to comment on important events. Even in his seventies and eighties, Vondel remained an indefatigable commenter on what he, and usually his patrons, considered to be right and wrong. While atypical in terms of the volume, the quality, and the exceptional impact of his work, Vondel offers an instructive case to investigate the ways in which literature affected the public sphere since he commented on so many issues and mastered all the most important persuasive genres.

First and foremost, Vondel commented on the news of political and religious developments in a never-ending stream of topical poems. He was a master in epideictic poetry, the classical genre of praise and blame that was so popular in the Renaissance. Aggravated by what he perceived to be the bigotry of Counter-Remonstrants, Vondel first tried his hand at political satire at the height of the Truce Conflicts. In a poem called 'Op de Waeg-schael' ('In the Scales') he described how 'Gommer and Armin to court / Their religious feud had brought', and how Arminius had been judged more sensible and rightful, until

the Prince came by his [Gommer's] side
And in Gommer's higher scale
Laid his blade, to such avail,
That all other things proved slight
By the sword's weighty might.¹⁸

As would often be the case in later years, Vondel here successfully applied an image to the politico-religious conflict of his time. Accompanied by an equally powerful engraving, the poem employed the metaphor of the scales, associated with the personification of justice, to denounce Prince Maurice and the leading Counter-Remonstrant theologian, Gomarus, in unmistakable terms, and to implicitly accuse the prince of tyranny for using his military power to promote an unjust cause (Figure 7.1). In later years, Vondel's poems against the Counter-Remonstrants would only become sharper, as he railed against the Calvinist doctrine of Predestination. Various of the images he coined stuck to his opponents and were repeated by like-minded poets and publishers throughout the century.



Figure 7.1 Salomon Savery (attr.), ‘Op de Waeg-schael’, 1618.

While epideictic poetry named and shamed, it was not always advisable to do so. Common-place analogies and allegories reigned in persuasive literary texts because they allowed criticism to be concealed behind a timeless image and could, if troubles arose, be presented as harmless. Although they allowed the articulation of poignant subversive meanings or criticisms of the elite, they made such meanings more ambiguous so that they could always be denied in case of trouble. Perhaps Vondel’s most impactful play was *Palamedes, or Murdered*

Innocence, an allegory on the execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt. In it, Vondel dramatized the story of a minor figure in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Due to fear of persecution, *Palamedes* was published six years after the fact, but this did not prevent most readers (the play was never performed because of its subversiveness) from recognizing that *Palamedes* was in fact a powerful denunciation of Maurice of Orange's *coup d'état*. The analogy between Oldenbarnevelt and the rather obscure mythological character became so famous that their names were used as equivalent throughout the century.

The readiness of Vondel's audience to read topical politics into a mythological story on the few clues Vondel gave them is telling for the literary culture of the period. In a society in which metaphorical thinking was deeply engrained, authors could rely on their readers to search for political applications of the classical or biblical guise in which they expressed their critiques. This in itself is yet another sign of the Dutch audience's great political awareness and involvement.

Conclusion

The concept of discussion culture, minted in the optimistic 1990s, tends to overemphasize social harmony and popular participation in politics and to turn a blind eye to the bigotry, violence, and repression that also attended public debate in the Dutch Republic. Despite the appearance of openness, public debate was structured to a considerable extent by power and patronage, and a fear of violence, rather than a heartfelt desire to exchange opinions. In their ideas about public participation, the regents of the Dutch Republic were not unlike the rulers of other countries in Europe; most regents very much resented popular discussion of and meddling with the arcana of state and church government.

One might well question the uniqueness of the Revolt as well. After all, other civil wars, such as Wars of Religion and the Fronde in France, or the Civil Wars in Britain, also produced temporary public spheres and violent pamphlet debates. One of the major distinctions of the Dutch Revolt, however, was that it actually succeeded. Unlike elsewhere, a popular uprising produced a new state, a new order that accidentally survived. Thus the Revolt was able to produce one of its most lasting inheritances: that the ideals its leaders shared with

ancien régime leaders elsewhere had become impossible to enforce permanently. The booming book market, religious and political mentalities shaped by the Revolt, and a flourishing rhetorical culture ensured that politics and religion remained publicly contested domains.

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Part IV

Economy and Trade

A Market Economy

In the 1650s the Dutch artist Nicholaes Maes painted a spinner (Figure 8.1). The picture depicts an old woman seated at a spinning wheel in a sparsely lit room, fully immersed in the intricate work that the spinning of wool or flax entailed. The painting by Maes is one of many portrayals of domestic interiors, typical of the Dutch Golden Age. Several seventeenth-century Dutch artists such as Johannes Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch, and Esaias Boursse in their work also captured the various chores women performed in early modern Dutch households, including lace-making, sewing, and preparing food. These remarkable paintings are generally interpreted as depictions of domestic devotion; the women in the pictures embody contemporary ideals of feminine beauty and domesticity.¹ Yet, these images also tell other stories about the Dutch Republic: those of working women, of the importance of service personnel in Dutch households, and the growth of the proto-industrial textile industry.

Like the old woman in the painting by Maes, many other early modern Dutch women were active as spinners. While spinning traditionally is regarded as a domestic task, we know that many women spun in return for a wage. In the textile city of Leiden in 1581, 77 per cent of all female heads of household were employed as spinners, and shares were even higher in the eastern town of Zwolle (1721) and the southern village of Tilburg (1661): 85 per cent and 95 per cent respectively. Alongside these widows and single women, wives and daughters also spun, as well as (occasionally) men. It has been estimated that by the mid eighteenth century, when the Leiden textile industry was already past its peak, the city's weavers were supplied by approximately 14,500 spinners who produced the woollen yarns for the famous Leiden cloth, which was



Figure 8.1 Nicolaes Maes, *The Spinner*, 1650s.

traded across the globe.² The humble task of spinning thus was of enormous significance, both for the survival of many households in cities and the countryside, as well as for the blossoming of the wider Dutch economy. Moreover, the numerous female workers in the textile industry are seen as one of the key factors in the remarkable success of the pre-industrial Dutch economy.

Famously labelled the ‘first modern economy’ by Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, the Dutch Republic is widely regarded as the country that experienced unrivalled economic expansion at the turn of the

seventeenth century, fundamentally changing the character of the economy. This in turn had a profound effect on the lives of the country's inhabitants.³ Central features of this 'modernity' included a highly specialized labour force (which included women and children); the existence of relatively free markets in goods, capital, and labour; high levels of education and training leading to a highly skilled workforce; and major technological advancements in, for instance, ship-building and milling. It is true that several of these features could also be found elsewhere in early modern Europe: for instance in cities in northern Italy, where we see the first banks flourish as early as the fourteenth century, or in the German cities of Nuremberg and Augsburg, which showed remarkable technological progress long before the Dutch Republic did. What made the Dutch economy of the Golden Age stand out, however, is the unique and unprecedented combination of these features in a cultural climate of religious toleration and relative political stability and autonomy.⁴

Agricultural Change

To understand how the Dutch Republic achieved this remarkable feat it is helpful first to direct our gaze to the countryside, which, in a country that is famous for its large number of urban centres, might seem contradictory. However, economic historians such as Jan de Vries and Jan Luiten van Zanden argue that changes in the rural economy created important pre-conditions that allowed the overall economy to prosper.⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2 of this volume, in the first half of the seventeenth century large-scale land reclamations were very popular in the north and west of the country. Helped by technological innovations and a financial infrastructure that were essential for such mega-projects to take off, large sections of land were reclaimed. The new land allowed farms to increase in scale. Sixteenth-century sources such as the *Enquete* or *Informacie* reveal that most rural inhabitants were small-holders, farming small plots of land. This changed fundamentally between 1580 and 1670 when these peasants turned into farmers running large, capital-intensive farms. Since the demand for grain was increasingly met by imports from the Baltic, the new-style Dutch farmers were able to specialize in the production of high-value industrial crops, such as hemp, madder, and flax; in vegetables (such as carrots, cabbage, and

beets); and in dairy farming. An extensive and highly efficient network of waterways allowed for easy access to urban centres where produce and dairy were sold in local, regional, and inter-regional markets.

The increase in scale had important implications for both the rural and the urban economy of the Dutch Republic. During the Golden Age the character of rural communities changed profoundly. The expansion of farm sizes meant that part of the peasant population had to find alternative means of earning a living, as the growth of large farms had come at expense of smaller ones. The outcome is clearly reflected in tax registers of the late seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries. When in 1674 such a register was compiled for the *polder* of De Zijpe (reclaimed in 1579), in the far north-west of Holland, the population of the *polder* was engaged in a great variety of economic activities. Roughly half of the approximately 600 heads of household were employed in agriculture, the majority as dairy farmers. However, the various hamlets in the *polder* also housed people employed in a wide range of crafts, including tailors, cobblers, and weavers, as well as in shipping and trade. Strikingly, we also find a notary public, a schoolmaster, a surgeon, and a midwife as part of this community, illustrating the high level of economic specialization that characterized rural Holland. Finally, the large number of casual labourers is a significant feature in the 1674 tax list: ninety-one household heads (one-sixth) earned a living as such. While De Zijpe's economy in many ways is typical for the countryside of Holland, we should acknowledge that the occupational and social structures of rural localities could vary significantly, even within the same province. For instance, the economy of neighbouring Winkel, some fifteen kilometres east of De Zijpe and in population approximately a third of the size, was even more geared towards trade, services, and industry. In 1742 just one-third of its household heads were employed as farmers. Alongside farmers, among Winkel's inhabitants we also find spinners, seamstresses, and even a shopkeeper who specialized in selling cloth.

The contrasts between different rural economies become even more pronounced when we expand our view to the other provinces. Much has been written about the profound differences between the economies of the maritime and the inland provinces of the Dutch Republic. Friesland and Zeeland are generally considered as being on a par with Holland as they were also characterized by high levels of agricultural commercialization and specialization. In contrast, the eastern provinces, including

Guelders, Overijssel, Brabant, Limburg, and especially Drenthe, lagged behind. Infertile sandy soils, continuous military operations during the Eighty Years' War, and communal control over arable fields contributed to the fact that agricultural specialization did not occur and productivity levels remained much lower than in the coastal provinces. This did not, however, mean that the rural economies inland remained unchanged, nor that these areas were not engaged in market exchange. One of the most prominent examples of engagement in inter-regional markets perhaps was the lively trade with Danish Jutland in oxen, an activity in which was mostly undertaken by Groningen farmers. Farmers in Drenthe bred cattle for sale too; they typically sold their livestock to fatteners in the coastal pasture districts. A certain level of occupational diversification is also apparent in the eastern villages and hamlets, albeit this happened slightly later than in the coastal areas, from 1670 onwards, and was mostly within the agricultural sector where greater distinctions could be found between large and small farms, cotters, and farm labourers.⁶

A good indication of the level of agricultural change, which also clearly reflects the regional and provincial differences, is the availability of retail services in the countryside. We have already been introduced to the owner of a specialized cloth shop in rural north Holland. Such a shop would be rare in other parts of the country outside the cities. Indeed, up until the nineteenth century in the eastern provinces one would be much more likely to encounter general shops or ambulant traders selling a variety of goods. Measuring retail densities indicates not only that the north Holland countryside had exceptionally high levels of people employed in commercial occupations (28 per 1,000 population), but also that some eastern provinces had higher levels than others. While Overijssel had very low average numbers of retailers, 4 per 1,000 population, the province of Guelders, on the other hand, counted 14 traders per 1,000 population on average. While both are inland provinces and often contrasted with the highly commercialized coastal areas, it is clear that, as in the province of Holland, within the eastern provinces there was also great diversity in the character of the economy.⁷ Nevertheless, despite large regional variation, the increase in farm sizes, first in the western provinces and later in the east, had important consequences for the character of rural society. It also profoundly affected the wider economy, and I will turn to that now.

Workers, Work, and Wages

The large rural workforce was a crucial feature in the process of economic growth during the Dutch Golden Age. As has been argued by Jan Luiten van Zanden, the changes in the structure of the rural economy, alongside demographic growth, meant that these casual labourers formed an ever increasing supply of workers. These wage workers were flexible and had an agricultural base to fall back on. As such, they could be employed in the various rural and urban industries, in shipping and transport, and in engineering projects whenever there was a demand for workers.⁸

The extraordinary numbers of rural workers allowed export industries to get off the ground, increase in scale, and prosper. An important centre of proto-industrial production was the cluster of villages in De Zaanstreek where ship-building flourished, and thousands of workers were employed in shipyards and associated industries such as rope making and sail-cloth weaving. Similarly, in the city of Gouda, numerous men, women, and children found employment in the clay pipe industry that served smokers across the globe. Other examples of such proto-industrial hubs were the cities of Delft (earthenware), Leiden, and Haarlem. The latter cities were major centres of woollen and linen production and offered employment to a range of textile workers, including spinners, weavers, shearers, dyers, and fullers. Each of these early capitalist industries was characterized by sharp divisions of labour, with workers concentrating on only part of the production process; this made these industries highly efficient and thus very competitive internationally. Together with large-scale industries more directed towards local and regional markets including brewing, distilling, tobacco processing, and sugar refining, the export industries provided work to large sections of the urban and rural populations.

A second very prominent sector of the Dutch economy, which required large numbers of workers, was shipping. The Dutch Republic is often seen as a maritime country par excellence; reflective of that is the Dutch language, which is still full of maritime expressions. Numerous workers found employment in the various branches of shipping including the merchant fleet, the fisheries, the navy, and the East and West India Companies (VOC and WIC). Recent estimates of the number of maritime workers in the Dutch Republic show that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the numbers of sailors varied

between 50,000 and 60,000 annually. To put this in perspective, this constituted around 15 per cent of the male labour force in the coastal provinces. Already at the start of century, in 1609, it is estimated that some 47,000 men and boys were employed in shipping, indicating the early importance of the maritime labour market for the economy overall.⁹ The largest sector of maritime employment was the intra-European merchant marine with some 20,000–25,000 workers on average throughout the early modern period. The numbers in the other branches of shipping were much smaller. The herring fisheries, for example, are often seen as one of the major industries of the country; contemporaries were also highly impressed by this trade. In 1610 the English gentleman Sir Walter Raleigh estimated the revenues of Holland's herring industry at 21 million guilders. While this is probably an overestimation, in the first decades of the seventeenth century the industry was flourishing, and somewhere between 570 and 770 herring busses departed annually from the ports on the North Sea and Zuiderzee coasts.¹⁰ Nevertheless, even at its peak the number of men aboard the herring fleet accounted for less than 15 per cent of the total number of maritime workers. Numbers in the navy fluctuated heavily between times of war and times of peace, but in quiet periods they were stable at roughly 10,000 sailors. Greater fluctuation and change can be observed when we turn to the large trading companies, the VOC and WIC, albeit each Company shows a different trend. Initially, the WIC was the bigger recruiter of the two until it took a sharp fall due to a decline in the South American salt trade. The VOC was well known for its perpetual hunger for personnel as a result of high mortality rates aboard its ships and in Asia, the so-called Indian leak (*Indisch lek*). However, in terms of numbers of workers it was off to a slow start, and it was only in the second half of seventeenth century that the numbers reached a level comparable to those in the navy.

The almost unquenchable thirst for workers meant that wages in return for labour were high. Compared to the rest of Europe, wage labour was unusually common in the Northern Netherlands already in the late Middle Ages, and it became an even more prominent feature of the economy in the centuries after that.¹¹ Furthermore, during most of the early modern period wages were high in Holland, especially in the cities, and particularly compared to other European countries. A comparison of wages for builders between 1500 and 1800 shows that the only period in which Southern Netherlandish wages were

substantially higher than those offered in the western provinces was the second half of the sixteenth century.¹² It is true that women's wages were generally much lower than those paid to men and, since living costs were high in the Dutch Republic, real wages were somewhat tempered.¹³ Nevertheless, the high nominal wages made it highly attractive for workers, both male and female, to migrate for work from areas with lower wages to the Northern Netherlands. Prominent groups migrating to the Dutch Republic included seasonal migrants such as hay-makers who moved from Westphalia to the coastal provinces during the late summer, life-cycle migrants such as sailors and servant girls originating from Scandinavia and Germany, and textile workers from France and the Southern Netherlands who settled in the industrial towns and cities. The peak of immigration was towards the end of the Dutch Golden Age, in 1650 when the overall share of immigrants in the Dutch population was 8 per cent, a level comparable to today's. Afterwards, this dropped to a level of around 5 per cent, which would be maintained throughout the early modern period. It is important to remember, however, that these percentages are averages for the Dutch Republic as a whole: half of early modern Leiden's population were immigrants at one point, and in Amsterdam shares of 40 per cent were also common in the seventeenth century.

Recent micro-studies have illuminated the experiences of some of these labour migrants, whose lives often remain hidden due to their low social and economic status. Accounts such as those of Swabian Martin Wintergest, sailing for the VOC at the turn of the century, illustrate the working conditions on board East India ships: these were very harsh due to a combination of heavy labour, limited food supplies, disease, extreme weather, and boredom. In addition, such accounts also give an insight into the circumstances of recruitment and the way knowledge about the Dutch labour market was disseminated. In 1699, 29-year-old Martin arrived in Amsterdam through a well-functioning network of intermediaries (skippers, innkeepers, and shopkeepers). Even though he had originally trained as a baker, his experience in various European shipping trades probably made him a useful employee for the VOC. He signed up with the company in 1699 as a *konstabelsmaat*, assisting with the upkeep of armoury on board the ship. After two voyages to Asia, he travelled back to his home town of Memmingen where he started a family and established himself as an overseer of the arsenal.¹⁴ The story of two seventeenth-century Norwegian immigrants to

Amsterdam, Magnus Andreson, a sailor in the navy, and Barbara Pitris, his wife, shows how, rather than returning home, other migrants settled, often in small communities of workers with a similar cultural and professional background. In the case of Magnus and Barbara this was in the immigrant neighbourhood of the Jonkerstraat and Ridderstraat where they lived with other Norwegians, some of whom would sail on the same ships as Magnus.¹⁵ The fate of Else Christiaense, famously depicted by Rembrandt, reveals yet another type of migrant experience. A fellow Scandinavian, she left Denmark at the fairly young age of eighteen. Her story, often retold, is a dramatic one and shows the precarious position these young workers could find themselves in. In April 1664 Else came to Amsterdam to find a better life and to search for employment as a servant girl. Servant girls had become very sought after due to the growing importance of cities and the increasing numbers of middling households (see Figure 8.2). After Else's arrival in the city she found a place to stay, but was unable to pay the rent. According to the court records, her landlady threatened to confiscate Else's belongings and hit her with a broomstick, upon which Else defended herself by hitting her landlady with an axe, resulting in the latter's death. She was subsequently arrested and convicted to death by hanging. At that point, Else had only been in Amsterdam for two weeks.¹⁶

Migrant workers such as Martin, Magnus, Barbara, and Else were an important feature of the early modern Dutch economy. While the majority worked in large-scale industries and shipping, substantial numbers were also employed in guild-based crafts. Although perhaps not as significant as in some other European societies, guilds did play a prominent role in the urban economies of the Northern Netherlands and governed many crafts and trades, from retailers to silversmiths, from painters to butchers. The share of immigrants was particularly high in crafts such as those of bakers, tailors, and cobblers.¹⁷ In the wider European context, the large presence of foreigners in guild-based crafts is somewhat unusual. Guilds tended to be restrictive in their membership policies and generally excluded those who were outsiders in a community. Dutch guilds, however, were more open and flexible than their European counterparts. There was generally no exclusion on the basis of social or migration status, or religious denomination except for Judaism; many different people therefore had the opportunity to join a guild if they were able to afford the membership costs. The inclusive character of Dutch guilds, as compared to guilds elsewhere, is widely seen as a key component of the origins of Dutch

Commerce and Finance

The inclusive nature of early modern Dutch institutions is also one of the more recent explanations for the growth of international commerce during the Dutch Golden Age. The traditional narrative tells that the fall of Antwerp to the Spanish in 1585 led to an unprecedented flux of merchants moving from the Southern to the Northern Netherlands. Their business knowledge, contacts, and wealth would have kickstarted the sudden rise of Amsterdam from being a small town to the most important commercial centre in the world. This was helped by a simultaneous shift of trade movements from trading over land and in the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. However, most historians currently agree that this version of events is somewhat too simple. As we have read above, it is widely recognized that in the growth of the Dutch economy developments in commerce and shipping cannot be separated from those in agriculture and industry. In addition, foreign trade could flourish only in the context of an economy that performed well in all these (well-integrated) sectors. Moreover, scholars now universally accept that the shift to Amsterdam as the leading international market was not so abrupt and had a longer history in which the towns of the Low Countries from the thirteenth century increasingly engaged in international trade with, among others, the German hinterland, France, and the Baltic. Nevertheless, the Dutch Revolt did form an important break, not least because of the separation of the Northern and Southern Netherlands. Furthermore, the closing off of the river Scheldt meant that alternative routes had to be found for trade activities that had previously gone through Antwerp, the city that preceded Amsterdam as a major hub for international trade.

Attracted by good geographical conditions such as a safe and accessible harbour, the river IJ, and excellent connections to a highly developed industrial hinterland, merchants flocked to Amsterdam in the late sixteenth century in larger numbers than ever before. The local merchant community specialized in the freight trade to, among other places, the Baltic and the Iberian peninsula. The newcomers thus found in Amsterdam a city that was highly connected to the rest of the trading world; however, they also encountered a city that had excellent commercial facilities. Oscar Gelderblom has recently argued that, as a result of intense competition between cities, in contrast to other European countries, town councils in the Low Countries actively

promoted trade.¹⁹ This gave rise to a commercial infrastructure that served not only local but also foreign traders. Famous examples are the Bank of Amsterdam (founded in 1609) and the Exchange (1611), but beyond that we should think of maritime insurance, rules for speedy court proceedings, and networks of hostellers, brokers, and notaries, providing services and information to the merchant community as a whole. Amsterdam was not alone in creating such institutions, as cities such as Rotterdam and Middelburg, both housing substantial merchant communities, also set up marine insurance offices and built exchanges. The extent of the commercial infrastructure in Amsterdam, however, surpassed those of the smaller port cities. Together all these facilities created conditions exceptionally favourable to commercial enterprise, allowing the city to blossom.

Amsterdam during this period became known as the world's *entrepôt*: the place where goods from all corners of the globe were shipped and warehoused, and from where they were re-exported to places in Europe and beyond. William Temple was one of several foreign observers commenting on the staples market when he in 1673 wrote that 'both strangers and natives bring commodities hither, not only as to a market, but as to a magazine, where they lodge until they are invited abroad to other and better markets'.²⁰ It is true that one could find a wide variety of goods, including those of the most exotic nature, in the Amsterdam markets. However, it is suggested that we should not regard Amsterdam merely as a transit port for goods. Instead what was characteristic of the city at this point in time is that it was a gathering place of merchants *and* of information. Many goods that were traded through Amsterdam never reached the city, but were shipped from their origins to their destinations via the intermediation of merchants based in Amsterdam. Because of the excellent transport links, and the extensive personal contacts between merchants in Amsterdam and elsewhere in the world, the city developed into an 'entrepôt of news': the place in Europe where one could find the most up-to-date information on, among other things, commodities, prices, newly discovered territories and sea routes, and interest and exchange rates.²¹

The easy access to reliable information and the existence of a highly developed system of commercial services were not only of great importance for the expansion of the market in goods, but also for the blossoming of financial markets. This would lead to Amsterdam becoming the core of the international capital market in the eighteenth century.

Capital markets had developed early in the Low Countries: evidence of property mortgages, for instance, can be found as early as the eleventh century. Shipping shares were commonly used to fit out ships and finance trade voyages; already in the early sixteenth century investors ranged from the well-to-do to people of more modest means. The VOC took this strategy to fund voyages even further when it was founded in 1602. While its labelling as the first modern corporation has recently been nuanced, it was ahead of its time in the way it was able to raise a starting capital of 6.4 million guilders through the sale of shares. Almost instantly after their launch, trade in VOC shares flourished and, through a financial technique called '*prolongaties*' (allied transactions), the selling and reselling of stocks resulted in the offering of short-term credit. Apart from shares, the VOC offered another form of credit: IOUs (documents constituting a formal acknowledgement of debt). Through issuing IOUs the Company offered its sailors the opportunity to cash part of their salaries before embarking or while at sea. This credit was used by sailors to acquire gear and provisions, as well as to provide for their families in their absence, and was later replicated by privately run systems in which shopkeepers played a central role.²²

Such formal credit systems were supplemented by more informal but nevertheless widespread mechanisms, such as shop credit and pawn-broking. It is important, however, not to confuse the facts that these facilities were readily available, and that they were characterized by relatively low thresholds, with access for all. Frugality and savings are often seen as part of the Dutch national character; yet studies of the use of a variety of credit facilities, including the reselling of VOC shares, use of IOUs, and pawn shops, have shown that savers consisted mostly of households from the middling groups and up. At the same time, as Anne McCants put it, these credit facilities were immensely important for 'greasing the wheels of commerce for petty traders'.²³ As such they played a crucial role in the development that has been labelled 'the Industrious Revolution', which would hit the country at the dusk of the Golden Age.

Industriousness and Consumption

The period after the economic Golden Age, starting around 1650s, is no longer simply regarded as a time in which the economy of the Northern

Netherlands stood still. Quite the opposite, the century that followed is now seen as an era in which a major transition took place that would fundamentally affect the economy of households and the country at large. According to Jan de Vries, who proposed the theory of the Industrious Revolution, the Dutch economy at this moment saw important changes in work patterns and simultaneous shifts in consumer demand. Consumerism was therefore able to blossom despite increasing prices and stagnating wages. The Dutch Republic was the first country to experience such changes, but it would be closely followed by England, where these transformations would prepare the way for the Industrial Revolution.

A wide range of evidence, including probate inventories, visual sources, and objects, shows how dramatically the material world of Dutch people changed just after the mid seventeenth century. While during the Republic's phase of economic expansion many of the urban elites were able to lavishly consume all kinds of luxury goods, this opportunity made itself available to the masses only in the stagnating economy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Partly this is explained by the fact that it took some time for the VOC's trade with Asia to gain momentum. Only from the second quarter of the seventeenth century were the quantities of colonial goods brought into the Dutch ports large enough to substantially lower the prices of exotic groceries. This made, for instance, tea and coffee accessible to many middling and even poorer households, who in turn bought items of porcelain (pots and cups) and silver (spoons) to be able to serve these colonial drinks. In addition to a trickle-down effect in which we see wider segments of society engaging in conspicuous consumption, we also see the new consumer behaviour spreading geographically. In-depth studies of the material cultures of households from the towns of Maassluis in Holland and Doesburg in Guelders, and from the villages in south Holland to rural Friesland, show how households everywhere surrounded themselves with a wider selection of household goods. This increase in goods was not limited to colonial goods and associated wares, but also pertained to fairly basic, (often) locally produced items such as tables and chairs, cutlery, pots and pans, and textiles. To explain this transformation, we therefore should look beyond the increase in volume of goods imported into the Dutch ports.

The key to the shift in consumer patterns needs to be sought in changing patterns of work on the household level. Firstly, people

started working longer hours and observed fewer holidays. Secondly, more members of the household than ever before would have turned to market production. The effect was twofold: on the one hand, these households increased their earnings, allowing them to spend more, and on the other hand their productive labour boosted the supply of marketed commodities. The exact nature of this process is still very much debated, but there is a growing body of evidence highlighting the increasing importance of market work for households. For instance, research shows that the number of women in the labour force increased towards the end of the 1600s. Recent calculations of labour force participation rates by Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Ariadne Schmidt show that by 1600 at least 38 per cent of Dutch women performed market work, but this went up to a minimum of 50 per cent by 1665.²⁴ Many of these women found a job in the retail sector, which has been found precisely at this time to accommodate married women in large numbers.²⁵ The question remains, however, whether these workers were motivated by a desire to increase their consumption, as the theory of the Industrious Revolution suggests, or whether they simply had no alternative than to take up (extra) market work in order to survive.

The issue of precisely how people experienced economic change is also a sticking point when assessing the economy of the period that is widely known as the Golden Age. This is illustrated, for example, by in-depth studies of poverty in seventeenth-century Dutch cities. As the well-known saying goes, all that glitters is not gold and, despite the extraordinary wealth accumulated during this era of economic progress, many inhabitants of the Dutch Republic did not share in the country's riches.²⁶ Among the recent gains in the understanding of the early modern Dutch economy are the studies that illuminate the economic experiences of previously hidden, but numerically very important groups including women, children, migrants, and the poor. These show a different side to the traditional narrative of the Golden Age which is predominantly inhabited by (male) merchants, artists, and master artisans. Yet another significant re-adjustment to the classic story of the economy of the Golden Age are the studies which have alerted us to its medieval roots, as well as its aftermath. Both strands suggest a much longer history of economic progress, innovation, and exceptionality than the seven decades between 1580 and 1650.

Notes

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Global Trade

On 10 October 1651, Arnold de Vlamingh van Oudshoorn, the governor of Ambon on behalf of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), made a visit to the private residence of Karaeng Pattingalloang, chancellor of the kingdom of Gowa-Talloq at Makassar, South Sulawesi. The VOC and Makassar were long-standing rivals for the trade in fine spices from the Moluccas, and tensions in the region were high. Six months before the meeting, peace between the two powers had been jeopardized after a local rebellion against the Dutch had ignited the Ambon War (1651–5). Van Oudshoorn and Pattingalloang, however, were both capable diplomats, and communications between the two men developed smoothly. Pattingalloang had a good command of Latin, Spanish, and Portuguese, and an avid interest in European books, globes, and scientific instruments. He also had an excellent knowledge of global affairs. In the interests of Makassar, Pattingalloang asked Van Oudshoorn if he thought the recent expiration of the Ten Years' Truce between Portugal and the Dutch Republic would affect Luso-Dutch relations in Asia. Van Oudshoorn immediately saw the bigger picture. He acknowledged that events in Brazil, where the Portuguese monarchy had tacitly supported a revolt against the regime of the West India Company (WIC), made it likely that the war would be resumed. For Pattingalloang this was highly relevant information, but it was no surprise. He admitted that the Portuguese had 'indeed behaved treacherously' in Brazil, and estimated that as a result, 'in *all* of the Indies', Portugal would suffer from the force of the Dutch.¹

Both for the Amsterdam regent and for the Sulawesian ruler what happened in one part of the Dutch orbit had the capacity to influence geopolitics and trade in the other hemisphere. For citizens of today's

global village, where distance has practically disappeared and information barriers are increasingly regarded as artificial (and permeable), this is perhaps evident. For scholars of Dutch global trade, however, it is not. The narrative of overseas expansion in the Dutch Golden Age is still being dominated by the institutional dichotomy that was devised in the early modern Dutch Republic. The unbridled success of the VOC in the Indian Ocean is typically juxtaposed with the failure of the WIC in Africa and the Americas but, even four centuries after their establishment, the two companies are rarely studied together. The late seventeenth-century refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope might serve as a unifier between two hemispheres and two scholarly communities, but an authoritative monograph exploring that connection, too, is still waiting to be written.² This chapter provides an overview of the Dutch trade experience in seventeenth-century Asia and the Atlantic world, and seeks to explore, amidst some of the excellent historiography on the joint-stock companies, if there are new methodological possibilities for historians willing to dismantle the divide between East and West, and seek the global connections between Batavia and Recife, Ceylon and Curaçao, Deshima and Manhattan.

The Emergence of Dutch Global Trade

Before the Dutch Revolt against Spain erupted, there was no strong impetus from the Low Countries to establish an overseas trading network. Individual merchants from Brabant and Zeeland already traded in the Atlantic world. They mostly co-operated with New Christians to transport sugar from plantations in Portuguese Brazil to Antwerp, the leading north European trade entrepôt. Several firms had close economic ties with the colonial sugar aristocracy, and Antwerp traders who owned sugar mills sometimes employed workers from the Low Countries. Their collective experiences in the Americas, however, did not make any headlines in Europe. The participation of a 'well-mannered' African slave from a Brazilian sugar plantation in an Antwerp procession of 1561 was as flamboyant as it was exceptional. In Asia, during the sixteenth century, the lucrative spice trade remained an exclusively Portuguese affair. Very little is known of individuals from the Low Countries who rounded the Cape of Good Hope and carved out a role in the *Estado da Índia* until 1580, when the Union of the Crowns



Figure 9.1 Hendrik Vroom, *The Return to Amsterdam of the Second Expedition to the East Indies, 1599*.

brought together the two Iberian empires. The succession of Philip II to the Portuguese throne radically changed the geopolitical complexion in Asia. Jan Huygen van Linschoten, a young man from Enkhuizen who spent five years in Goa in the service of the local archbishop, returned to the Low Countries in 1592 with valuable intelligence on the everyday practice of trade in the Indian Ocean. His book *Itinerario*, published in Amsterdam in 1596, is generally considered the real starting point of Dutch overseas expansion.

Within a decade of *Itinerario*'s appearance, the Dutch had replaced the Portuguese as the leading European mercantile contingent in Asia. The first expeditions into uncharted waters had been difficult: the so-called *Eerste Schipvaart* (First Maritime Expedition) of 1595 was characterized by diplomatic mishaps, leadership struggles, and misfortune. Only one-third of the crew returned to Amsterdam in 1597, and investors received little revenue. The search for an alternative, northern route to Asia resulted in heroic failure at Nova Zembla (Novaya Zemlya) and was not attempted again until the late nineteenth century. Subsequent expeditions, however, demonstrated the ability of the Dutch to make unprecedented profits in the Indonesian archipelago. The *Tweede Schipvaart* (Second Maritime Expedition) returned from the East Indies in 1599 with a rich cargo of pepper, nutmeg, mace, and cloves (Figure 9.1). In the subsequent three years, more Dutch than Portuguese ships rounded the Cape of Good Hope, reflecting not only rapid expansion and continuing profits but also increasing competition

between merchants and investors from the Dutch Republic. In order to channel Dutch interest in Asia, the States General in 1602 decided to establish the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company or VOC), the world's first joint-stock company.³ Led by a board of seventeen directors, the Heeren XVII, and supported militarily by the federal government, the Dutch East India Company quickly succeeded in ousting the Portuguese from the Moluccas to obtain a monopoly in fine spices, for which there was great demand in Europe.

Institutionally, the newly established Company reflected both the federal set-up of the emerging Dutch Republic and the mercantile predominance within the federation of the maritime provinces Holland and Zeeland. Of the seventeen directors, eight originated from the 'chamber' (*kamer*, or the head office) in Amsterdam, four from the one in Zeeland, and one each from the chambers of Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen. The seventeenth director was appointed in turn by one of the four small chambers, thus ensuring that the Amsterdam elite could not impose its will on the others. Investments and revenues were divided accordingly. Each chamber had considerable autonomy, with its own capital – raised by shareholders from all layers of society, and its own regional board of directors, usually formed by the main investors, one or more of whom were sent to the Heeren XVII as representatives of the local chamber's interests. Each chamber also fitted out its own ships. The Company charter (*octrooi*) stipulated a monopoly on trade for twenty-one years from the Cape of Good Hope eastwards to the Strait of Magellan, and was regularly extended and renegotiated. In due course, the VOC would appoint a governor general in the East Indies who would make decisions that required knowledge of local customs or that could not be delayed until orders from home had arrived.

In 1619, VOC administrators founded Batavia, on the island of Java, as its headquarters in Asia. Under the accomplished yet occasionally ruthless leadership of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the Company extended its monopoly in spices throughout the Moluccas, safeguarded Batavia against attacks from the Sultanate of Mataram, and used its strong position in the archipelago as the vantage point from which to establish *factorijen* (trading posts) across the Indian Ocean littoral. By the early 1640s, the VOC trade network extended from Gamron (Persia), Surat (India), and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), along the Coromandel coast to Bengal and further east to Siam (Thailand), Formosa (Taiwan), and the

artificial island Deshima in Nagasaki Bay (see Map 3). Here the Dutch enjoyed exclusive access to Japanese commodities for more than two centuries. In this myriad of different cultures, the Company skilfully navigated between its bullish ambitions as a trading company and its more awkward role as an unofficial diplomatic actor.⁴ The VOC would gradually expand its trade also to the southern part of the Malabar coast and to China and would increase its efforts to develop the plantation at the Cape of Good Hope. Together these trading posts formed the nodes of an elaborate intra-Asian trade network that long predated the presence of the VOC in the Indian Ocean, but in which the Company now excelled as the main carrier of goods, with access to a wide variety of oriental markets. By the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the hemispheric trading network was so successful that the High Council in Batavia no longer needed financial injections from Europe to finance its Asian operations. All products that the VOC returned to the Dutch Republic could be sold there purely for profit.

The Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie (WIC) was designed to be the sister company of the VOC.⁵ Its charter was originally drawn up around 1606 in the wake of seemingly unlimited success in Asia, but its foundation was suspended in negotiations with Spain over the Twelve Years' Truce. Individual trade was thus allowed to continue (and with considerable success) until designs for a monopolistic company were revived as the armistice reached its conclusion in 1621. Institutionally, the WIC mirrored the VOC. A board of nineteen directors, the Heeren XIX, was made up of representatives from Amsterdam (eight), Zeeland (four), the northern quarter (two: Hoorn and Enkhuizen), and the Meuse (two: Rotterdam and Dordrecht), and further expanded by a regional chamber in Groningen (two). One director represented the States General, evidence of the 'national' importance of a company that was explicitly designed to enter into military conflict with Habsburg America. Public confidence in the success of a monopolistic company in the western hemisphere, however, was not as unrestricted as it might have been twenty years before. The VOC had acquired notoriety for not paying dividends to its shareholders as promised, which undermined the appeal of the WIC as it attempted to assemble capital. Further negotiations were required because merchants in Hoorn and Enkhuizen wanted dispensation for their *de facto* monopoly on the trade in Venezuelan salt. And because many would-be shareholders considered the risk of taking on Spain in the Atlantic world too great,

it took until 1623 before the Company could finally embark on its 'grand design'.

In comparison to the VOC, historians have traditionally regarded the WIC as a costly failure, but as a flurry of recent scholarship on the Dutch Atlantic has demonstrated, this is only half the story.⁶ The WIC's first campaign against Habsburg Brazil in 1624 was a resounding success, culminating in the conquest of Salvador de Bahia, the colonial capital, and the capture of the Portuguese governor and the provincial of the Jesuit order. It required the largest-yet Iberian armada to cross the Atlantic Ocean to recapture Salvador the following year. Spurred on by Piet Heyn's capture of the New Spain treasure fleet at Matanzas Bay, Cuba, in September 1628, the WIC invaded Brazil for a second time in 1630. Dutch Brazil, for more than two decades, would be the centre of a flourishing Atlantic empire. John Maurice of Nassau-Siegen, the colony's charismatic governor, extended its borders to Sergipe in the south and Maranhão in the north, ultimately controlling seven of Brazil's fifteen captaincies. The WIC supplied the sugar plantations of Pernambuco with slaves from Elmina (Ghana) and the great slave station of São Paulo de Luanda (Angola), taken from the Portuguese in 1637 and 1641 respectively. A well-functioning triangle of Atlantic trade briefly resembled the intra-Asian trade network of the VOC (see Map 2). Dutch Brazil, however, collapsed as quickly as it had emerged. The planters' revolt of 1645 that Van Oudshoorn and Pattingalloang would be discussing in Makassar six years later sparked an extended war that the WIC narrowly lost. Bitter feuding at home about the maintenance of the Company monopoly catalysed military defeat and eroded popular support for another attempt to build an Atlantic empire. As the memory of Brazil faded, and Peter Stuyvesant's New Netherland finally succumbed to English pressure in 1664, the WIC scaled down its ambitions to 'expansion without empire', with lasting settlements only on the Gold Coast of West Africa, in Suriname (taken from the English in 1667), on the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, and in the Lesser Antilles.⁷

The Nature of Dutch Expansion

The question of why the Dutch were so successful in establishing a global trade network has inspired generations of historians, and can

be answered in a number of ways. That the ‘general crisis of the seventeenth century’ played a part in the rise of the Dutch Republic as a worldwide power is not always emphasized by scholars today. Few would disagree, however, that both the institutional disjointedness of the vastly stretched Iberian empires, and the religious and political turmoil the English and French monarchies experienced until the 1650s, enabled the Dutch Republic to extend its maritime supremacy beyond Europe and corner the trade in fine spices, sugar, and – briefly – slaves. Cinnamon and elephants from Ceylon (on which the VOC also obtained a global monopoly), pepper from Malabar, silk and textiles from Bengal, porcelain from China, salt from the Lesser Antilles, and beaver fur from the Hudson Valley were some of the other main products in the Companies’ extensive trade network. Both Companies excelled at finding the most lucrative markets for their expanding portfolio of exotic merchandise.

Naval and military support from the States General was crucial in advancing the mercantile cause of both Companies.⁸ In the Atlantic world, the WIC employed many thousands of European soldiers to invade and defend Brazil. The VOC used force to remove the Portuguese from strategic locations such as Malacca (1641), Ceylon (1658), and Cochin (1663) and continued to dominate the main trading routes in the Indian Ocean until the turn of the century. The Companies’ aggression was directed at all European competitors, not just the Habsburgs. In 1623 VOC employees tortured and executed ten servants of the English East India Company and their Japanese associates to preserve their monopoly on nutmeg and mace in what became known as the Amboyna Massacre. The scandal resonated far and wide. Thirty years later, when Dutch colonists in New Netherland stirred up their Narragansett allies to take up arms against their Puritan neighbours in Connecticut, English pamphleteers observed that ‘Amboyna’s treacherous Cruelty [has] extended itself from the East to the West Indies.’⁹

Military clashes with Spain, Portugal, and England were essentially overseas chapters of European wars. But most encounters in Asia and the Atlantic world were intrinsically global in character. In theory, as part of the many overseas conflicts, the Companies were meant to respect the liberties of the indigenous peoples they encountered. In the Americas in particular, this was seen as a projected correction to the ‘tyrannical’ way in which Spain had sacrificed any lingering moral obligations to repress and enslave the non-

Europeans they encountered.¹⁰ The opening exchanges in both hemispheres did indeed suggest that the Dutch would adopt a slightly more tolerant approach – perhaps partly as a consequence of their own propaganda. In Asia, where the VOC had no choice but to co-operate with local traders in order to obtain pepper and spices, however, diplomatic pragmatism was abandoned in 1621 when Jan Pieterszoon Coen committed genocide against the population of the Banda Islands (subsequently repopulating them) to enforce the monopoly in nutmeg and mace – still seen as one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Dutch Republic. In the Atlantic world, the ‘Black Legend’ narrative of Spanish cruelties against ‘innocent’ Americans compelled the WIC to adapt to the trading habits of indigenous groups such as the Munsees on Long Island and the Mohawks in the Hudson Valley, but here too relations turned sour after disputes with the Raritans over land and property led to Kieft’s War (1639–45), and several other bloody encounters. In Brazil, the Dutch struck an awkward military alliance with the cannibalistic Tarairiu.¹¹ Initial objections against the morality of the slave trade turned out to be paper-thin when the economic situation on the plantations in Brazil required the import of enslaved labourers from West Africa. By the late 1630s, compliant ministers at home legitimized John Maurice’s increasing demand for African slaves. Ultimately the Dutch would transport around 600,000 enslaved men and women to plantations across the Atlantic Ocean.¹²

These painful stories must be integrated into a historiographical narrative of the Dutch Golden Age that is still being dominated by trade. There is every reason for change. The Netherlands were the last colonial power in Europe to abolish slavery – on its Suriname plantations in 1863 – seven months after Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, but, perhaps more tellingly, fifteen years after France and thirty years after Britain. Views of the Dutch contribution to global history are rapidly moving beyond the economic perspective, but substantial emancipatory histories of the Dutch empire in Asia and the Americas remain to be written. There are as yet no studies of seventeenth-century life on the plantations in Brazil and Suriname that incorporate new developments in social and cultural history. In a similar vein, there are still no major works that study the ‘Asiafication’ of the VOC over the course of the Dutch Golden Age, even though more and more indigenous workers – often involuntarily –

facilitated the Company's smooth integration into the Indian Ocean trading system in the second half of the seventeenth century.

One myth of Dutch global expansion which has been pierced by a number of historians in recent years is that of religious toleration.¹³ All colonial administrators were members of the Reformed Church, at least in name, and the presence of the public church in the colonies was strong. In the late seventeenth century only the city of Amsterdam housed more ministers than Batavia. On ships and inside fortresses both the VOC and WIC maintained strict religious discipline. Sailors and soldiers were of mixed religious descent, and potential threats to homogeneity from German and Scandinavian Lutherans were closely monitored. When the Lutheran Church in Amsterdam paid for a minister to preach to its flock on Long Island, the WIC ordered the staunchly Calvinist governor Peter Stuyvesant to send him back to Holland immediately. Nowhere in the seventeenth-century Dutch world would Lutherans be allowed freedom of worship, despite their numbers. Yet Calvinist orthodoxy rarely flourished. The Companies generally did extend freedom of conscience to other Christians. In formerly Portuguese colonies such as Brazil, Malacca, Timor, and southern India, the overwhelming presence of Iberians and the proximity of Catholic clergy meant that there was little the Companies could do to eradicate Catholic practices, despite the indignation of Reformed ministers. Jewish merchants were officially accorded freedom of worship in Brazil (where they were allowed to build the first synagogue in the Americas), on Curaçao, and in Suriname. Toleration, however, was pragmatic rather than ideologically driven – a means to an end. In a 'Dutch' world in which the Dutch never made up more than 40 per cent of the population, and often less, calls for orthodoxy were simply unrealistic.

Even more disappointing, from the perspective of the church, was the lack of missionary success. Although the Companies professed to spread the Reformed faith on behalf of the States General, efforts at conversion along both oceanic basins were haphazard. Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims were not generally susceptible to Reformed doctrine, unless Catholic missionaries had paved the way. Only in Formosa did the VOC succeed in attracting considerable numbers of non-Christians to the Reformed Church. In the Atlantic world, religious campaigners faced an uphill struggle to convert indigenous inhabitants after warnings from orthodox factions in the church that the

Algonquian and Tupi languages were too unsophisticated to transmit the Word of God. For African slaves on the plantations of Brazil and Suriname, conversion to the Reformed faith served only the rational (and understandable) cause of obtaining freedom from slavery. Once Dutch missionaries understood the reasoning behind the Africans' susceptibility to Reformed austerity, they stopped their efforts at conversion altogether – an approach that would be copied in several English plantation colonies in North America.¹⁴ Occasionally, insisting on Reformed principles was outright counterproductive, and was hastily abandoned. In the Kingdom of Kongo, the local ruler ordered an auto-da-fé of Calvinist catechism books the WIC had distributed, while in Japan any mention of Christianity could jeopardize diplomatic relations (and thus trade) with the shogun.¹⁵

Decline in the Atlantic World, Consolidation in Asia

The weakness of European rivals, naval and military strength, and ideological flexibility, then, came together to build a global trade network in the Dutch Golden Age. Political developments within Europe also contributed to its gradual decline. Due to the nature of the two most significant geopolitical changes, the WIC's Atlantic empire collapsed very rapidly. The VOC's trade network in the Indian Ocean proved more robust and continued to be profitable, although in relative terms its revenues too began to shrink by the end of the century. The first cause of the gradual decline of Dutch global trade was the end of the Eighty Years' War in 1648. Both Dutch trading companies had been set up to counter the global dominance of Habsburg Spain. By the time Spain faded as an enemy, the Dutch system in Asia was well developed and crucially positioned to resist a new geopolitical threat from France and especially England. The only significant setback in Asia came with an indigenous uprising in Formosa, inspired by Ming China, which led to defeat in 1662 – coined in Dutch contemporary historiography as *t'Verwaerloosde Formosa* (Neglected Formosa). In the Atlantic world, the main WIC territory in Brazil did not play a role in upcoming battles against north European rivals. According to contemporaries, Brazil too was lost because of negligence (*Verzuymd Brazil*), as were the trading stations in Angola and at São Tomé. A short-lived war with Portugal (1657–61) did not provide enough impetus for an aggressive

return to the South Atlantic. In 1674, broken by the surrender of Brazil twenty years before, the West India Company went bankrupt. The Second WIC that was immediately established had more modest ambitions.

The second reason for the Companies' decline was the lack of a population surplus in the Dutch Republic. The expansion of the economy in the seventeenth century had pulled many thousands of foreign labourers to the province of Holland, and those who joined either the VOC or the WIC were often Germans, Scandinavians, and later Huguenots. Yet the continued availability of work in Holland, and the relative religious tolerance, meant that there were no classic push factors, either for locals or for immigrants, to seek adventure across the ocean. Once again this did not develop into a problem in Asia, where European companies and regimes more generally had accepted from the very start that their employees would be vastly outnumbered by local inhabitants and made plans accordingly. In the Atlantic world, however, settlement colonies relied for their prosperity on European immigrants. Both on the plantations of Brazil and in the fertile valleys of New Netherland, more settlers meant greater production and greater control for the Company. Here the lack of a population surplus had grave consequences. In Brazil, Portuguese sugar planters who had initially co-operated with the Dutch regime made their numbers count during the revolt. In New Netherland, on the eve of the Second Anglo-Dutch War, 5,000 Dutch inhabitants were no match for the more than 35,000 English immigrants who had settled in New England and were keen on expanding to the south in search of more land.

What distinguished the Dutch empire in the Golden Age was that it prospered as long as it remained 'alongshore'.¹⁶ The preferred locations for urban settlements were along deep-water natural bays (such as New York Bay or Table Bay – despite the storms that plagued the latter), or on sandy reefs just off the main coast (such as in Brazil or on Formosa), both ideal for conducting maritime trade. The similarities between towns such as Batavia and Recife, both located in a sheltered bay and facing towards other port towns across the water rather than to the hinterland where fortifications were constructed, were arguably bigger than the differences, especially when we consider the urban extensions and canals that were laid out at times when trade flourished (Figures 9.2 and 9.3). Many of these newly founded settlements or new discoveries received identical names, east and west. Staten Island, after

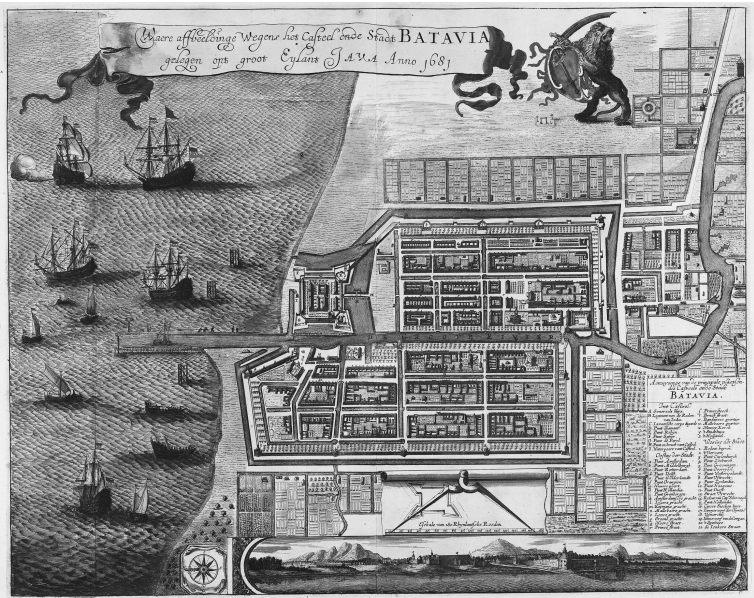


Figure 9.2 Anonymous, *City plan of Batavia*, 1681.

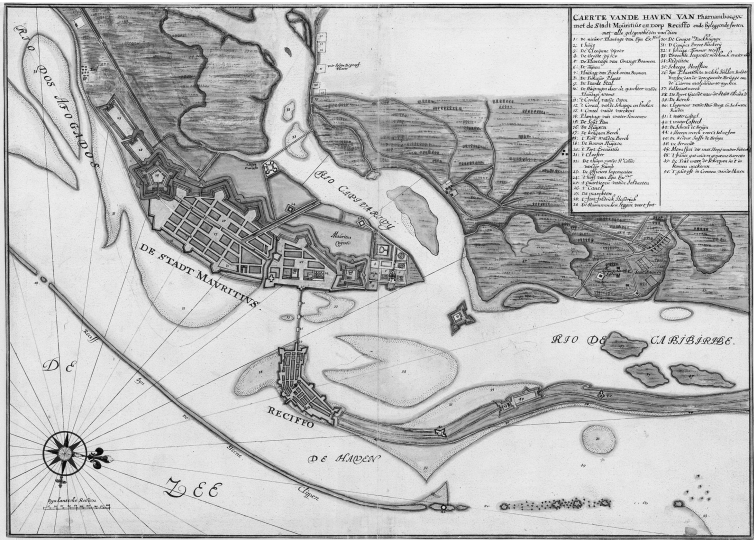


Figure 9.3 Anonymous, *City plan of Recife*, s.d., Nationaal archief, The Hague.

the States General, could be found not only in New York Bay, but also off the coast of Tierra del Fuego (Argentina). New Zealand too was first named Staten Island by Abel Tasman in the 1640s. Fort Zeelandia was established first in Taiwan, and then along the Suriname river. New Holland was an alternative name for Dutch Brazil before VOC employees used it to denote Australia.

What *was* different was the environment the Dutch faced, the plantation system in the Americas being less suited to the trade-and-transport dynamics of the joint-stock companies than the scattered market of the Indian Ocean which facilitated European involvement only on its fringes. Around 1630 the VOC's investments in a well-balanced trade network in the Indonesian archipelago and on strategic points along the Indian Ocean littoral began to bear fruit. By charting and shaping demand in Asian markets for products the Company obtained elsewhere in the Orient, revenues increased in spectacular fashion. Private investors of the first hour who had held on to their original shares until 1650 would have received a cumulative dividend of around 800 per cent. In the third quarter of the seventeenth century, mainly as a result of the flourishing intra-Asian trade, the Company's profits continued to grow, albeit at a somewhat slower pace because of substantial overhead costs. Yet increasing competition from the English East India Company in the wake of the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–4), especially in the pepper trade, and the changing terms of trade in Japan, where the shogun's prohibition of the export of gold and silver deeply affected the Company's flexibility, required the Heeren XVII to maintain their high-level military and diplomatic investments. In the final decades of the seventeenth century, the relative value of the trade in spices began to dwindle, heralding the shifting balance of trade in the eighteenth century.

In the Atlantic world, the Dutch had encountered strong competition, and hence a financially draining demand for guns and soldiers, from the very beginning. Although the WIC too had laid the foundation for a thriving trans-oceanic trade network by the early 1640s, it never managed to reap the benefits of its early investments due to the volatile indigenous politics of Angola along with Luso-Brazilian reluctance to pay for African slaves the WIC had delivered on credit. Local contexts were thus a major factor in distinguishing success and failure. This implies, however, that the difference between the two Companies traditionally emphasized by historians has been exaggerated in hindsight.

The (failed) attempt to create a merger between the two Companies in the mid 1640s when the WIC's first charter expired just at a time when it was going through the first of its financial crises is generally interpreted as indicative of their different political and economic trajectories. Ultimately the VOC was not prepared to take on the debts of its Atlantic sister company.¹⁷ Yet the fact that the merger was contemplated in the first place, and debated for more than three years in the highest political circles in The Hague indicates that, for contemporaries, the two Companies were not all that different. Historians are increasingly open to this view, and comparative studies of the different hemispheric trade networks will be able to provide new insights on the role of the Dutch in global history.

Globalization of People, Commodities, and Ideas

The history of overseas trade is no longer solely about ships and the goods they carried, but also about people. In the institutional idiom that has dominated scholarship of the joint-stock companies, focused on monopolies, shareholders, dividends, and state sponsorship, individual merchants and their networks have not received adequate attention, despite their importance as cross-cultural agents or interlopers.¹⁸ But there is good reason to view Dutch global trade through the prism of the individual, whether merchants, sailors, or members of groups that have traditionally received less attention. For women who remained behind, it made little difference if their loved ones were stationed east or west. Their contributions to the maritime sector at home are more and more appreciated by scholars today.¹⁹ One interesting recent development is that historians have emphasized that the slave trade was not confined to the Atlantic world, but was also ingrained in the networks of the Indian Ocean. Although the numbers were considerably lower, the VOC transported forced labourers from the hinterlands of Batavia and Cochin to the Cape of Good Hope, a lucrative trade that is only beginning to be understood.²⁰ National and international studies on the slave trade have traditionally been dominated by numbers – all essentially addressing the question 'How many?' Perhaps the different nature of the slave trade in Asia can lead to a broader horizon for research on the Dutch contribution to the history of enforced labour that also focuses on values and ideas, and on who exactly the Dutch enslaved. Throughout the

Dutch Golden Age, individual merchants and armchair travellers continued to oppose and condemn the trade in human beings. Much of our current knowledge of representations of the slave trade, however, is still based on scholarship from the 1980s.²¹

European soldiers, sailors, and administrators connected both hemispheres (and both Companies), each one individually contributing to a global network of mercantile and maritime expertise. It is little known, for example, that the career of Dirck Gerritsz Pomp, possibly the first 'Dutchman' ever to reach China in the service of the Portuguese around 1570, ended with his imprisonment at the hands of Spanish colonists in Valparaiso, Chile. On a more successful note, Hendrick Brouwer was selected as head of a mission to Chile's Mapuche Indians in 1642–3 partly because of his achievements as a navigator in the Indian Ocean, where thirty years earlier he had first discovered the so-called Roaring Forties – the strong westerly winds around 40 degrees latitude that drastically shortened travel time between the Cape of Good Hope and Batavia. Margrieta van Varick accompanied her first husband, a merchant, to Malacca and her second one, a Reformed minister, to Flatbush, New York. Here she set up a textile shop and accumulated books and exotic possessions which are testimony to a life beyond both horizons.²² There must have been many anonymous global adventurers like them. Given the chronology of Dutch expansion, their voyage was usually the other way around: young men first participated in the trade network of the Dutch Atlantic before making a career in Asia. Johan Nieuhof is an obvious example. One of thousands of Germans who populated the Dutch orbit, Nieuhof spent almost a full decade as a soldier in Dutch Brazil before embarking for China in the 1650s, where he famously took part in an embassy from Canton to Beijing. In the 1660s he was a diplomat first in Kerala, India, and later on Ceylon, before returning to Batavia. In 1672, when collecting fresh water on Madagascar while on a return voyage to Europe, he was probably killed (a belatedly organized retrieval mission, in any event, was unsuccessful). His observations of Dutch global trade – from corruption in Pernambuco to ship-building in China – were published in Amsterdam, rapidly translated into French, German, Latin, and English, and remain an important source for historians today.²³

Another German, Zacharias Wagner, can perhaps be regarded as the ultimate global servant of the Dutch cause. Born in Dresden, he started his career as a draughtsman in the service of the Blaeu family, the official

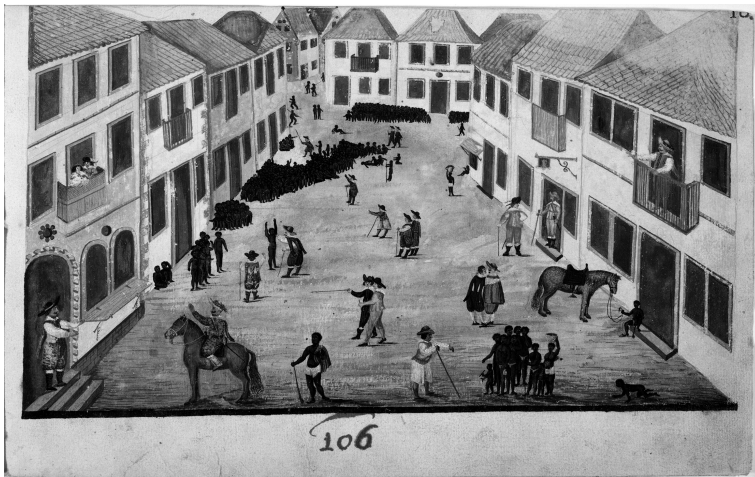


Figure 9.4 Zacharias Wagner, *Slave Market at Recife*, 1630s–1640s.

cartographers of first the VOC and later also the WIC. In Brazil, under the approving eye of John Maurice, he composed a *Thierbuch*, a sketch book which included not only exotic insects and other animals, but also plants, indigenous Brazilian life, and – most memorably – a depiction of the slave market in Recife (Figure 9.4). In 1642 he returned to Amsterdam and moved on to Batavia, where he joined the Company's hydrographic bureau, which was responsible for drawing maps of the different Asian trading routes and destinations. A strategic marriage to a widow fourteen years his senior saw him enter the colonial elite. In 1656 he was appointed commander of the trading post in Deshima, Japan. Twice he made the long journey on foot from Nagasaki to Edo, where the VOC presented gifts to the shogun in an annual ritual that was meant to cement their exclusive status. In 1657, Wagner had the honour of presenting to the shogun a globe, made for this purpose by Joan Blaeu, with a diameter of 130 centimetres. The gift was highly appreciated. In subsequent years, the shogun ordered further globes, as well as world maps and atlases – all made by Blaeu – a remarkable feat of cultural diplomacy and a telling reminder of the global scope of the Dutch world-view during the Golden Age.²⁴ Wagner was awarded a high post on the only continent where he had not yet served: in 1662, he succeeded Jan van Riebeeck as commander of the Cape Colony, where he developed a court culture that attempted to emulate

the artistic and scientific achievements he had witnessed as a young man in Brazil.

The two joint-stock companies relied on journeymen like Pomp, Brouwer, Nieuhof, and Wagner – and on women like Van Varick – whose experience in one hemisphere must have served them well in the other. They are only five of many hundreds of thousands of Europeans who sailed the oceans in the interests of Dutch trade. In the seventeenth century, more than 300,000 men (and occasionally women) boarded a VOC ship heading for Asia, a number that would triple by the time the Company was dismantled in 1795. But only a fraction of those who set sail for Asia settled there (semi-)permanently. The ‘resident’ European population in Asia by the end of the seventeenth century did not exceed 25,000; in a city like Batavia, with a total population of approximately 32,000 around 1680, the Dutch elite were vastly outnumbered by Chinese, Malay, and Javanese inhabitants.²⁵ In the Americas the numbers of settlers were even lower. Although it is worth noting that Portuguese chroniclers in Brazil felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of soldiers fighting on behalf of the WIC – 7,000 men participated in the invasion of Pernambuco, and shipments to Brazil of up to 3,000 auxiliary forces were not exceptional – very few Europeans stayed in the disease-ridden tropics for much longer than was necessary. Those who did settle in the New World adopted an embattled cultural attitude. In the Hudson Valley, the Dutch community was sizeable enough to protect and retain its distinctive identity until the end of the nineteenth century, when the last traces of the Dutch presence (language, liturgy, architecture) finally disappeared.²⁶

Conclusion

Collectively, people in the Dutch orbit transported not only commodities across the globe, but also knowledge of the non-European world, which, as we have seen in the meeting between Van Oudshoorn and Pattingalloang in Makassar, intimately connected the two hemispheres. If the Spanish empire, thriving in the sixteenth century, can be regarded as trading mainly in gold and Catholicism, and the English and French in the eighteenth century battled to tip the geopolitical balance of power in their favour, the VOC and WIC in the seventeenth century, besides their obvious interest in trade and political prowess, supplied other Europeans

with information about the world beyond the horizon – much more confidently than the secretive Portuguese empire it most closely resembled. Maps by the likes of Joan Blaeu dominated Europe's world-view long after the two Companies had been dissolved. Astronomical, botanical, and zoological works by Georg Marcgraf, Willem Piso, Jacob Bontius, and Georg Eberhard Rumphius exerted great influence on early modern science – and tied in with similar works on the Arctic, the Levant, and Russia, areas that were outside the charters of the two Companies. For readers of these works, the institutional division between the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean world no longer determined the way they perceived Dutch global trade networks.²⁷ By the eighteenth century, as Dutch commercial dominance gradually receded, the encyclopedic interest in Europe had conflated the West and East Indies to such an extent that paintings of the Brazilian landscape by Frans Post could be sold at public auctions as exotic views of China.²⁸

In a scholarly culture focused on two oceanic basins that were institutionally separated, each with its own historiographic traditions, these examples of cultural conflation have been considered eccentricities in an era that was efficiently organized by trade and monopolies. This is of course perfectly understandable. Trade, closely intertwined with the geopolitical urgency of the war against Habsburg Spain, was the main driving force behind Dutch expansion from the late sixteenth century onwards, and the chartered companies served as two of the most important economic pillars of the emerging Dutch Republic. Yet recent research suggests that to contemporaries – as shareholders, mapmakers, missionaries, sailors, soldiers, or administrators in the service of either of the two joint-stock companies, or even as interlopers trying to liberate themselves from their constraints – the Dutch trade network may well have appeared to be a truly global one long before it became a fashionable scholarly term. Seen through the eyes of these individuals, Dutch global trade in the Golden Age connected the seven seas unimpeded by censorship, monopolistic charters, or hemispheric historiography.

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Part V

Religious Culture

Reformed Protestantism

Emerging as a powerful public force in the revolt against Spain in the 1560s and 1570s, Reformed Protestantism (or Calvinism) in the Netherlands also achieved its Golden Age during the seventeenth century. From the 1570s to 1700, the Reformed Church grew steadily into the largest religious body in the Dutch Republic. Ministers and lay activists worked tirelessly to place a decidedly Protestant stamp on laws and social customs, promoting Sabbath observance, proscribing Catholic worship, and pressing moral discipline in everyday life. Flourishing theological faculties in the new universities of Leiden (1575), Franeker (1585), Groningen (1614), and Utrecht (1636) made the Dutch Republic the intellectual centre of Reformed Protestantism throughout Europe. By virtue of the hundreds of pastors and lay chaplains (*krankbezoekers*) embedded in the commercial enterprises of the East (VOC) and West India (WIC) Companies, the Dutch Reformed Church also acted as the driver of a global Calvinism that stretched from the East Indies to the Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, the Golden Age in the Dutch Republic and its overseas commercial empire corresponded to a shining moment for Reformed Protestantism.

The unlikely rise of an often fractious, small confessional group on the eve of the Revolt to a widely influential religious institution in the seventeenth century owed a great deal to the remarkable political and economic achievements of the Republic and its global commercial aspirations. As the most intractable enemies of Catholic Spain, Calvinist ‘Beggars’, as they were called, seized the opportunity in 1572 to have the Reformed Church declared as the official public church in the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, and Friesland

where rebel forces held sway in most of the key cities. The public establishment of the Reformed as the official church followed the success of Beggar military forces and political factions throughout the other northern provinces down to the Union of Utrecht in 1579. Edicts prohibiting Catholic worship escalated in the early 1580s, so that by 1581 the States General had abolished almost every aspect of the Roman Catholic religion. Non-Reformed Protestant groups, such as Mennonites and Lutherans, also faced an official policy of intolerance, bolstering the privileged position of the Reformed Church.¹

City governments supported the Reformed Church, but in return expected its unswerving loyalty. Calvinists also enthusiastically supported long-distance trade and maritime exploration. The staunchly Calvinist minister in Amsterdam, Pieter Plancius, advised Dutch mariners on routes and navigational techniques, and participated in the syndicate that financed Cornelis Houtman's initial voyage to the East Indies in 1595. Plancius, Werner Helmichius, Hugo Grotius, and others envisioned the opportunity to reap profits and propagate the 'true Christian religion' among 'heathens' and 'Moors'.² Under the auspices of the VOC and WIC, Dutch pastors and chaplains worked to bring to Protestant Christianity as many non-European people as possible from the East Indies, Formosa (Taiwan), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Brazil, and other locations.³

Even though Reformed Protestantism was inextricably intertwined with the rise of the Dutch Republic and its empire, Calvinist ministers and theologians often did not feel comfortable with the secular instruments of its success. Historians have analysed extensively the tensions between the religious pluralism managed and protected by city governments and in opposition to the theocratic tendencies within Calvinism. Pastors in overseas territories regularly protested, usually in vain, against the limitations that Company governors placed on missionary projects and the latitude these political authorities allowed for other religious observances. The distinctive political, economic, and social contexts of the Dutch Golden Age consequently shaped the particular patterns of Reformed Protestant intellectual bearing and social engagement in the Netherlands and the wider world. To capture some of that historical complexity, this chapter will address four themes pertinent to Calvinism in the Golden Age: the consolidation of the public church, the pursuit of a disciplined community and society, the ongoing struggle

over right belief and practice, and the global dimensions of Dutch Reformed Protestantism.

The Consolidation of the Public Church

The elevation of the Reformed Church as the public, privileged ecclesiastical institution in the emerging Republic resulted from the close connections between Calvinism and political disaffection in the 1560s and 1570s. Calvinists in the Netherlands placed themselves at the forefront of the military opposition to the Spanish-Habsburg regime. In many cities, a significant number of regents and civic militias had joined the Calvinist cause, playing important roles in the capitulation of towns to the Dutch rebellion. As Holland, Friesland, and Zeeland went over to the Revolt, Calvinist exiles from Emden, London, and other locales returned and provided solidarity with international Reformed Protestantism. The provincial States rewarded their Calvinist allies by granting the Reformed faith its privileged status in what was becoming an independent Republic.

It took twenty years or so to work out the details of the relationship between civil and church authority in this new political environment. The regular operations of church life that affected most parishioners took place at the local level. City governments appointed ministers, paid their salaries, approved the election of elders and deacons, and oversaw the upkeep of parish properties. Yet church membership remained voluntary. Operating within the confessional lineage of Reformed Protestantism, Dutch ecclesiastical organization bore the closest similarities to the churches in Geneva and throughout France. A consistory, comprising pastors and elected lay elders, governed church affairs and upheld the disciplinary standards for remaining a member in good standing, a prerequisite for participating in the Lord's Supper. Within the local bodies, a board of elected lay deacons collected and distributed alms for the poor, sometimes in collaboration with municipal almoners and sometimes not. Lay chaplains helped ministers carry out their pastoral functions.

Consistories within a region, usually anchored by a sizeable city, such as Amsterdam, Delft, Middelburg, or Groningen, belonged to a *classis* (pl. *classes*), which superintended ecclesiastical affairs in the larger territorial jurisdiction. *Classes* within a larger area made up provincial

synods, one for each province except Holland, which had one in the south and one in the north. Finally, the provincial synods sent delegates to the national synod, though after the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19 the States General did not convoke another nationwide assembly. Conflicts sometimes surfaced among municipal or provincial political and church bodies over jurisdictional matters, yet this basic structure characterized the Reformed Church in Dutch society throughout the Golden Age.

In trying to account for the slow and uneven growth in the Dutch Reformed Church during this period, historians have been influenced by the so-called protestantization thesis, which underwent several iterations in the first half of the twentieth century. As the term implies, protestantization refers to the processes and phases by which the Republic became Protestant in fact as well as in name. The eminent Catholic historian, L. J. Rogier, reformulated it just after the Second World War to call attention to what he believed were the coercive social and economic pressures that compelled Netherlanders to leave the Roman faith and join the Reformed Church. He contended that churches used poor relief to entice the poor to become Reformed, and membership requirements for office holding to persuade elites.⁴ Most historians of the seventeenth-century Netherlands today regard Rogier's formulation of protestantization with a good measure of scepticism. Studies of poor relief in Holland and Zeeland show that Reformed deacons did not attempt to recruit members from among the poor through church alms and that, in some cities, such as Haarlem, Amsterdam, and Leiden, municipal charitable agencies offered assistance. Beyond the specific issue of poor relief, a number of historians have pointed out that the Reformed Church performed dual roles in Dutch society. On the one hand, the church functioned as an exclusive religious community, whose members agreed to submit themselves to the discipline of the consistory. On the other hand, the church served a public role. Ministers baptized children and married all from Christian families, even Catholic ones. Church services were open to all. Arie van Deursen has shown that many people, known as *liefhebbers* (sympathizers), attended services and participated in aspects of church life without becoming members and subjecting themselves to discipline.⁵ Thus, the public dimensions of the Reformed Church mitigated against any forms of direct pressure to induce people to join.

The overall aim of the protestantization thesis, namely trying to explain the social, economic, and political processes in post-

Reformation Dutch society, has considerable overlap with the theories of confessionalism and confessionalization that have proven very influential among historians of the German Reformation. The former refers to the endeavour by almost every religious body, especially Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican ones, to clarify its teachings with precision and to promote doctrinal orthodoxy among its adherents. The enterprise of forming confessional statements and trying to enforce them necessarily entailed drawing sharp distinctions with the tenets of other groups and condemning them as false. Without a doubt, confessionalism constituted a driving force among pastors, intellectuals, and theologians within Reformed Protestantism in the Golden Age and helps explain the depth of the rancour in the doctrinal disputes within the Dutch Church. Calvinists in the Low Countries adopted the Dutch Confession of Faith, composed originally by Guy de Brés in 1561, and the Heidelberg Catechism by Zacharius Ursinus in 1563 as the two primary statements of Reformed doctrine. Subsequent synods, culminating in the 1618–19 Synod of Dordt, gave greater specificity to Reformed teaching in all doctrinal areas.

The confessionalization schema constructed by Heinz Schilling in the 1980s also has a limited application for understanding the development of the Reformed Church in Dutch society in the post-Reformation period. Originating in scholarship on the Holy Roman Empire but later applied in territories across Europe, confessionalization identifies the partnership of the burgeoning state with the confessional church and their joint programme of social discipline in forging distinct Lutheran, Catholic, and Reformed societies. In the Netherlands, municipal governments gave consistories little latitude in affairs outside the church. Perhaps most importantly, political authorities vigorously protected the principles of freedom of conscience and religious choice, making the Republic a haven for many dissidents during the early modern period. Judith Pollmann has offered the best recent formulation of the civic culture that municipal governments fostered.⁶ Focusing on the city of Utrecht (but with wide application), she argues quite compellingly that city governments tended to fashion a broadly non-confessional Protestant social ethos, keeping the theocratic ambitions of Calvinists at bay and creating private space for Catholics and dissenting Protestants. Sephardic Jews lived and worshipped openly in Amsterdam. Therefore, the Dutch Republic conformed in quite limited ways to the general outlines of confessionalization, as Reformed

consistories often found themselves at odds with urban regents. Yet within the church, confessionalism was a hallmark of Calvinism in the Golden Age.

Pursuit of a Pure Community: Discipline and Further Reformation

Though all confessional church leaders committed themselves to maintaining religious and moral discipline, calling out sin and punishing sinners became distinguishing features of the Dutch Reformed Church in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Dutch Calvinists enshrined discipline as one of the three marks of a true church, alongside preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments of baptism and communion. Again, Dutch Reformers drew from the practices of the Geneva and French Reformed Churches, yet the most direct inspiration came from the exile congregations in Emden and London from the 1550s and 1560s.

National synods in Dordrecht (1578), Middelburg (1581), The Hague (1586), and Dordrecht again (1618–19) embedded the disciplinary programme into the institutional fabric of church life. The ministers and elders conducted mutual censure and admonition among themselves and deacons, known as the *censura morum*, and then conducted house visitations of members several weeks before the communion service, held between four and six times a year. Members who were found or reported by others to be involved in sinful activity that jeopardized their own souls and threatened the honour of the congregation were convoked to appear before the ministers and elders. Consistories also received assistance from designated neighbourhood ‘inspectors’ (*opsieners*), who kept attentive to local dealings and reported suspicious activity. An instrument to restore honour or seek justice, consistories also acquired information from members who felt victimized by a fellow brother or sister in the congregation.

Most offences that consistories investigated varied from fighting, to quarrelling, excessive drinking, engaging in extra-marital sexuality, gossiping, marrying outside the faith, and failing to pay debts. Once a consistory found a member guilty of a transgression, the individual was suspended from taking communion until she or he confessed, displayed remorse, reconciled, and made any restitution for their sins.

For those whose transgressions were particularly heinous and public, they often had to undergo a public admonition and confession in a church service. Akin to the minor ban of excommunication in the Catholic Church, suspension from communion became the most prevalent punishment wielded by consistories. Recalcitrant members could remain suspended for years. Though rarely employed, the major ban of excommunication could be used against those who defied the consistory and refused to comply with the demands of repentance.

Consistories across the Netherlands – as well as in overseas congregations – put forth enormous effort in visiting, convoking, admonishing, monitoring, mediating, punishing, and reconciling members. Secretaries in many consistories kept detailed records, leaving extensive documentation of their disciplinary work, which have provided historians a portal into the inner workings of local communities and glimpses into the daily lives of men and women. Beginning in the 1990s, historians subjected discipline cases to quantitative analyses as well as critical scrutiny from a variety of perspectives to try to uncover patterns of social behaviour and church attitudes about them.

While minor local distinctions emerge, two broad trends have characterized the conclusions historians have drawn about consistorial discipline during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Firstly, cases that appear in the consistory records declined drastically over the course of the seventeenth century, so that by the close of the Golden Age disciplinary episodes in the records slowed to a trickle. Explanations for this waning trend have emphasized an assortment of factors, all of which have some legitimacy. It is likely that after decades of moral scrutiny and correction members understood church expectations and adapted standards of behaviour more readily than in earlier periods when reform was just getting underway. It is also probably true that the preoccupations and strategies of consistories evolved as the Reformed Church gained social acceptability. On a practical level, congregations also grew much larger than they had been at the start of the seventeenth century without a proportional increase in clergy, so discipline necessarily needed to be less labour-intensive. In these circumstances, it made sense for consistories to pursue alternative disciplinary tactics. Rather than ferreting out sinners in the congregation individually, Reformed ministers emphasized personal self-examination, promoted religious education, and publicly denounced heterodoxy and social degradation.

A second pattern concerns the gendered dimensions of disciplinary activity. Males came under censure slightly more often than females did and for contraventions typically associated with disorderly masculine conduct, such as fighting, drunkenness, carousing, and financial mismanagement. Women usually led the way in transgressive speech, including gossiping, slander, and scolding. Yet in the area of domesticity and sexual life, women and men came under censure at roughly the same rates. Men came before consistories in most cities with more frequency than women, which is somewhat unusual because women made up a larger percentage of church members than men.

Consistories, especially in the early years of the Dutch Reformation, encountered resistance in the 1570s and 1580s from a variety of outspoken individuals and non-confessional religious groups that opposed church discipline, carried out by ministers and elders. One of the most prominent critics of ecclesiastical discipline was Hubert Duifhuis, a libertine minister in Utrecht at the end of the sixteenth century. He, like a diverse array of libertines, non-dogmatic humanists, and spiritualists, including Dirk Volkertsz Coornhert in Haarlem, Caspar Coolhaes in Leiden, and Herman Herbertszoon in Gouda, believed consistorial discipline gave too much authority to ecclesiastics. The Remonstrant Johannes Uytenbogaert compared the Calvinist practice to 'papist' inquisitions that coerced consciences. In addition to opposition by religious figures, urban regents turned a wary eye towards independent-minded consistories intending to supervise the morals of church members. City councils in Leiden, Gouda, and Utrecht backed church leaders who opposed discipline and curtailed the activities of consistories in the 1570s and 1580s. However, by the end of the sixteenth century, a general acceptance of Reformed discipline began to take hold, even among regents who had earlier balked at it because of the moral order and social cohesion it promoted.

Nevertheless, consistories in most areas had to carry out disciplinary activity with a measure of discretion, lest they attract the ire of a city council. It seems that the fear of municipal reprisal contributed to the very small number of outright excommunications in Dutch churches. Arnold Buchelius, an elder in Utrecht, stated in his journal that the consistory there did not record half the names of people who came under suspicion so that elite members would not face embarrassment. These elites encountered discipline 'off the record', as Judith Pollmann has characterized it.⁷ Recognition of the shadowy, informal mode of

correction that fell outside the recorded cases in the consistory minutes has served to caution historians against drawing direct conclusions about patterns of social behaviour based on quantifying and categorizing discipline cases. Rather, consistory records reflect the concerns and initiatives of the ministers and elders, but do not provide an index of social conduct. Thus, a greater awareness of the political contexts of ecclesiastical discipline has compelled historians in the past fifteen years to be much more critical in interpreting consistory records than previously in the sweeping claims based on quantification.

The broad acquiescence to church discipline corresponded to a wide-ranging pietistic movement in the Reformed Church and Dutch society, known at the time and since as the Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*). Gaining momentum after the Synod of Dordt (1619), the movement embraced a more complete reformation of the heart, manifested in a devout spirit and a pious lifestyle. Proponents saw the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century as a critical theological return to biblical Christianity, yet now they maintained that it was necessary to go beyond intellectual assent to a thoroughgoing spiritual and moral transformation. The earliest and most outspoken advocate was Willem Teellinck, a pastor and prolific author in Middelburg. Inspired by the piety of English Puritans, Teellinck promoted pietism through his preaching, networking in Reformed clerical circles, and writing extensively. He published approximately 127 works. Many other prominent clergy and devout laity joined the campaign, including his brother Ewout, Godefridus Udemans, Jacob Cats, Dionysius Spranckhuijsen, and Johannes Hoornbeeck.⁸ The foremost representative in the mid and late seventeenth century was Gisbertus Voetius, the most influential Dutch Calvinist theologian for much of the Golden Age.

On a public level, these reformers were not satisfied with anything less than a transformation of Dutch society into a spiritual Jerusalem. The children of Israel had formed a prominent source of religious identity for Calvinists across Europe in the mid 1500s and gained even greater ascendancy in the Republic in the following century. The identification with Israel and Jerusalem reflected both a special sense of destiny for Dutch Calvinists and provided a framework from which they viewed contemporary events. The setbacks of Reformed Protestants in the Palatinate and Bohemia in the Thirty Years War and the revival of war with Spain after the Twelve Years' Truce in 1621 kept

Calvinists aware of God's anger and pushed them to bring about a reformation in all areas of life.

Struggles over Right Belief

The sharpened sense of confessional identity produced a preoccupation with theological precision among the major denominations by the early seventeenth century. Within the Dutch Reformed tradition, the concern for biblical orthodoxy produced two intense theological quarrels in the Golden Age that held far-reaching implications for Dutch society. The initial outburst occurred in the Calvinist–Arminian controversy, which reached its peak in the first two decades of the seventeenth century. A theological dispute revolving around the doctrine of predestination between Jacob Arminius and Franciscus Gomarus at Leiden University developed into a heated clash over the place of the church in the newly formed Republic. The followers of Arminius became known as Remonstrants after 1610, because of a Remonstrance (protest) several of them lodged to the States of Holland calling for a national synod to resolve the matter. Conversely, their Calvinist opponents were called Counter-Remonstrants. They aspired to a theocratic social order, whereas Remonstrants advocated government control over ecclesiastical institutions, lest clerics constrain individual consciences. Shortly thereafter another theological contest, over Sabbatarianism – originating in the 1650s but lasting well into the 1700s – brought into clear relief divergent conceptions of scripture, history, and philosophy. A theologian at Leiden University, Johannes Cocceius with his supporters sought to incorporate new philosophic systems, i.e. Cartesianism, to combat more radical attacks on Christianity. The more conservative wing of the church led by Voetius at Utrecht University, however, rejected these compromises as a fatal capitulation to naturalistic philosophy, which they believed would undermine the religious foundations of society.

Although the theological contest focused on the doctrine of predestination, the Remonstrant conflict brought to a head several long-standing tensions in the church and in society. Libertines had objected to ecclesiastical discipline since the church's establishment in the 1570s and had sought a more flexible religious outlook. Predestination had always been a staple of Calvinist theology, though in the highly charged

confessional atmosphere of the early 1600s, it became more absolute and took on greater importance. Arminius, a Reformed minister in Amsterdam and a theologian at Leiden University had expressed reservations about the prevailing formulation of the doctrine by William Perkins at Cambridge University, Herman Modetus, a pastor in Utrecht, and Franciscus Junius, Arminius's predecessor at Leiden, as well as others. While he held to a vigorous view of providence, Arminius maintained that the notion of unconditional election necessarily negated God's love and made him the author of sin. Similarly, he argued that humans had the capacity to resist the grace of God, a position that put him at odds with Calvinists. Gomarus strongly opposed Arminius' teachings, asserting the orthodox Calvinist view that God conferred salvation or damnation on individuals according to his own counsel before creation. As the debate spread beyond the confines of academic theological faculties, it generated furious controversy, animating burghers and leading to numerous public disturbances.

The dispute soon took on political and ideological aspects centred on the relationship between the public church and civil society, igniting fierce disagreements over ecclesiastical prerogatives to carry out discipline and shape public policy. Calvinists since the 1570s had defended the right of consistories, *classes*, and synods to discipline wayward members and expel heterodox ministers without interference from political authorities. Like their counterparts in other Reformed enclaves in Europe, Dutch Calvinists called for the complete suppression of Catholicism, Judaism, and non-Reformed Protestantism. Arminius, like Johannes Uytenbogaert, Simon Episcopius, Hugo Grotius, and other Remonstrants, took a much more irenic attitude towards other faiths, displayed a certain wariness about church discipline, and called for civil control over ecclesiastical matters. Both Remonstrant and Counter-Remonstrant partisans crafted narratives linking their doctrinal claims to the theological heritage of the Reformation and to a Dutch national identity.

Rival political blocs formed after 1605, as competing patronage networks and dynastic interests absorbed the religious and political ideologies. As a result, church conflicts became enmeshed in power struggles over the war with Spain and administrative authority in the Republic. The foremost political champion of the Remonstrant cause was Johannes van Oldenbarnevelt, advocate for the States of Holland, who was a friend of Arminius, Uytenbogaert, and Grotius. Oldenbarnevelt

supported peace with Spain established in the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–21) and worked to diminish the political influence of the stadholder, the nation's chief executive. Indeed, his chief rival was Stadholder Maurice of Orange-Nassau, who pushed for a resumption of war and sought to consolidate the authority of his office. Maurice eventually came down on the side of the Counter-Remonstrants. Oldenbarnevelt and his Remonstrant allies lost the political momentum because of grass-roots support for Calvinism by consistories and *classes* throughout most of the Netherlands. In 1618, the stadholder called for a national synod to address the Arminian articles of faith, which convened at Dordrecht (Dordt) in December. The outcome of the synod was never in doubt and, by June of the following year, it had upheld orthodox Calvinism and completely rejected Arminian teachings. Ministers who refused to accept the resolutions of the synod were expelled from office and banished from the country. In the political sphere, Maurice, with the support of the Counter-Remonstrants, strengthened his hold on city governments in Holland. Oldenbarnevelt, Grotius, and other Remonstrant leaders were cast out of office, and some were arrested. Oldenbarnevelt was executed on 13 May 1619. Calvinism emerged triumphant in the Dutch Reformed Church and the Dutch Republic; animosity between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants lingered for decades.

A second major episode of Reformed religious strife had less to do with the doctrinal tenets of the church than with the relationship between theology and new philosophical currents introduced by René Descartes in the mid seventeenth century. The origins of the dispute within the church concerned teaching about Sabbath practice, as the Leiden theologian Johannes Cocceius contended that the fourth commandment was not a universally binding moral law. Gisbertus Voetius, champion of the Further Reformation and a committed Sabbatarian, stood in firm opposition to Cocceius. Though Sabbath practice became the lightning rod for public controversy, the deeper criticisms Cocceius faced from Voetius and his followers concerned the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the proper means to interpret scripture. Cocceius' rejection of Sabbatarianism grew out of a hermeneutic that allowed for allegorical interpretation of some scriptural passages, such as the parting of the Red Sea. Reading the scriptures within their quite varied historical contexts, Cocceius recognized a significant discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments.

In his 1648 work, *Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God* (*Collationes de Feodore et Testamento Dei*), Cocceius put forth a progressive historical framework for the revelation of salvation in which distinct covenants contained particular conditions for salvation. In this schema, the laws and commands under the Old Testament had different application for the children of Israel than for Christians, who obtained justification through Christ's atonement.

Voetius upheld the traditional Reformed view that salvation came to all the faithful throughout all history through the atonement of Christ. Likewise, all people were accountable to a universal moral law enunciated in the Ten Commandments. Voetius charged that Cocceian covenant theology introduced different systems of salvation, one in the Old Testament and another in the New. Fundamental questions about the principles of biblical interpretation were equally at stake. Voetius and his followers charged that the abandonment of a clear literal interpretation compromised the Word of God and elevated human rationality over the plain text of scripture. Such betrayals could lead only to religious degradation and social ruin. Cocceius and others, however, contended that the standard Reformed approach to biblical interpretation that Voetius represented was wrong-headed and produced a faulty understanding of God's Word. As such, a literal interpretation was ill equipped to engage the challenges posed by new rationalistic philosophical currents in the Republic.

More troublesome for Voetians, Cocceianism shared an affinity with Cartesianism, which gave rationalist thought a foothold in the Reformed Church. Descartes attempted to create a rational basis for science and religion, using a penetrating scepticism to peel away all accretive assumptions about knowledge. Only after the systematic application of scepticism could one construct a new way of knowing based on deductive logic. For Voetians, Descartes' rationalism smacked of atheism, because it suggested that scripture and God were open to doubt and because it set aside the presupposition that the revealed truth of Christianity was the starting point for knowledge. Cocceius' method of biblical interpretation eschewed a uniform literalism, especially with regard to some of the fantastic episodes in the Old Testament. Rather, he argued that theologians should use historical understanding and philological methods to determine whether passages should be understood with figurative meaning or as literal fact. Though Cocceius himself opposed Cartesian scepticism, many of his followers such as Abraham

Heidanus and Christopher Wittichius adapted some of Descartes' principles as a means to bolster their arguments for religious truth against rationalists. According to Voetians, however, Cocceians had surrendered to rationalism by rendering divinely revealed religion subject to human understanding.

Though the struggle did not bring the Republic to the brink of civil war as the Remonstrant conflict had done, followers of Voetius and Cocceius squared off against one another in universities, consistory chambers, city halls, and town markets for years. Johannes Hoornbeeck, a colleague of Cocceius in Leiden, but also a former student of Voetius, fired off a refutation in 1655. Heidanus, also at Leiden, responded in defence of Cocceius' view with *De Sabbate* three years later and thereafter Voetius, as well as his adversary, rejoined the fray. Debates broke out in the Synods of South and North Holland in 1659, though the leaders attempted to tamp down the dispute by admonishing theologians, albeit unsuccessfully, to desist from writing on the topic. The provincial States responded in the 1660s to keep the theological conflict from exploding into a public furore. By prohibiting any further debate or publication on Sabbath observance, the States were able to muffle disputes surrounding Sabbath practice.⁹ Yet it proved impossible to contain the divisions caused by such a deep-seated divergence over the relationship between Reformed theology and the innovations in philosophy and science.

The conflict persisted well into the eighteenth century in part because Voetian and Cocceian factions became markers of conservative and moderate approaches to the revolutionary intellectual movements in the Republic. Voetians could not compromise because they saw themselves as the stalwart champions of orthodoxy against the insidious encroachments of atheism into Christian teaching and academic discourse. Those who espoused Cocceian principles varied considerably in their acceptance of Cartesian methods, yet they all opposed the inflexible and dismissive confessionalism of the Voetian party. Henricus Groenewegen, a pastor in Enkhuizen, fully embraced Cartesian principles and non-literal hermeneutics, whereas David Flud van Giffen, a Cocceian pastor at Sneek, avidly promoted the theocratic policies and puritanical morality of the Further Reformation. Cartesian thought influenced other rationalists who provoked the Reformed establishment throughout the Golden Age. Most famously Baruch de Spinoza, but also a variety of other less well-known figures, such as

Franciscus van den Enden and Frederick van Leenhof, continued to press the implications of rationalist thought for interpreting the Bible and questioning traditional theological positions. At the very end of the century, Balthasar Bekker, a minister in Amsterdam, incited a major furore with *The World Bewitched* (1691) in which he utilized Cartesian postulates to argue that the devil, as Christians had constructed him, was nothing more than a pagan superstition.¹⁰

City regents and provincial assemblies inadvertently contributed to the longevity of the dispute by devising a *modus vivendi* for managing it. In the second half of the 1670s, authorities required candidates for preaching positions to sign oaths of co-operation, and they alternated between Voetians and Coccieans in filling vacant ministerial posts. Fractured by fundamental questions over the interpretation and application of scripture, Reformed Protestantism coexisted rather uneasily with rationalist philosophical systems at the end of the Golden Age.¹¹

Global Dimensions

As a consequence of the commercial and colonial operations of the East and West India Companies, Calvinism went global in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Between 600 and 700 ministers and hundreds more lay chaplains in the employ of the trading companies set up churches and schools, preached the gospel, and sought to convert indigenous peoples in Asia, Africa, and America. Dutch ministers who went into overseas territories were first and foremost pastors sponsored by the Companies to provide spiritual oversight to employees and their families. Since the Dutch displaced the Portuguese in the East Indies, Ceylon, Brazil, and other locations, Company officers sought to cultivate loyalty among the natives, many of whom had undergone baptism at the hands of Jesuits, by bringing them over to the Reformed faith. Many pastors even went further to proselytize among the 'heathens' and 'Moors' who had little exposure to Christianity. Dutch evangelizing efforts represented the first and most sustained endeavour by Protestants to convert peoples outside Europe in the early modern period, other than Jean de Lery's brief and ill-fated experience among the Tupinamba people in Brazil in 1558.

The first pastors accompanied the VOC in the 1610s during a time when the Company governors Pieter Both, Gerard Reynst, Laurens

Reael, and Jan Pieterszoon Coen were pushing forcefully into the Molucca Islands. Subsequently, pastors travelled across the archipelago, preaching, baptizing, organizing congregations, and setting up schools in Ambon, Banda, and Ternate. Jakarta, renamed Batavia after Coen subjugated it for the company in 1619, served as the headquarters of the VOC and the flagship consistory in Asia. As the VOC also established itself in Formosa (1624–62), Ceylon (1640–1796), the Malabar and Coromandel coasts (1610–1798), and the Cape of Good Hope (1652–1792), consistories formed to govern congregations and schools arose to educate children and adults in the Reformed faith. Calvinist pastors and lay chaplains joined the WIC at its formation in 1621 and participated in its ventures in the Atlantic. Dutch Reformed congregations emerged in Brazil (1624–54), Elmina (1637–1872), Curaçao (1634–1954), Suriname (1667–1954), New Netherland (1624–64), and other areas.

Pastors overseas and in the Netherlands sought to replicate as much as possible a Reformed ecclesiastical structure and church life in the imperial territories. The *classes* of Amsterdam and Walcheren (Zeeland) recruited, vetted, and dispatched pastors and chaplains, and advised overseas consistories, but did not exercise any official authority over them. The VOC did not allow consistories to form *classes* or synods, whereas in Brazil ministers from Recife, Olinda, Paraíba, and Pernambuco established several *classes* and even a synod. All Reformed churches subscribed to the provisions of the 1618–19 Synod of Dordt, though they were modified somewhat by local church orders or by directives from the Companies. Both the VOC and the WIC asserted their authority to assign pastors to particular posts, a prerogative vigorously but unsuccessfully disputed by consistories.

The strategy for converting Catholics, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and practitioners of local religious traditions evolved out of European and local political contexts. Henk Niemeijer has noted that an assumption of *cuius region eius religio* guided both Company officers and church officials in determining the accessibility of ministers to a mission field of prospective converts. The possibilities for proselytizing varied considerably from one location to another. When the VOC negotiated commercial contracts with rulers in the East Indies and Ceylon, the company regularly promised not to interfere in the religious affairs of a locality if the sovereign was not a Christian. Yet in the decentralized polities of the East Indies, local elders (*orangkayan*) often found it expedient to ally with the VOC against other villages and to convert to the Reformed faith.

In these situations, pastors gained authorization to proselytize, and they did so with a strong sense of mission. In locations that the Company controlled politically, such as Ambon, Banda, Makassar, the coastal region of Ceylon, Brazil, and Formosa, consistories attempted to impose a theocratic order that their counterparts in the Netherlands were pursuing. From a Calvinist perspective, a 'Christian Republic' necessitated the prohibition of all forms of religious expression except those of the Dutch Reformed Church, the enforcement of the Sabbath as a day of rest and (Reformed) worship, the transformation of public space into a landscape free of all religious imagery except church buildings, and the regulation of marriage, sexuality, and social discourse according to Christian principles.

In this social milieu, pastors would preach the gospel and administer the sacraments of baptism and communion, and consistories exercised discipline over congregations. Consistories overseas, and in the Netherlands for that matter, were never able to implement this vision fully or consistently, as Company governors were unwilling to enforce edicts against non-Reformed religious expression with any regularity. Governors in Brazil even allowed public Catholic and Jewish worship. Just as in the Netherlands, ministers and civil authorities, represented by Company officials, pushed back and forth over the role of Reformed religion in colonial society. For missionary-minded pastors, these measures formed the optimal means for converting people to a Calvinist faith.

The success of Calvinist missions within the Dutch empire was uneven, never on a par with their Catholic or Muslim competitors, and in some areas quite meagre. Robert Junius (1606–55), missionary in Formosa, baptized around 5,000 native people in the 1630s and 1640s. At the end of the seventeenth century, Batavia reported 2,300 adult church members in 1674, Ambon 1,520 in 1714, Malacca 324 in 1731, and Ceylon 661 in 1732.¹² The most extensive proselytizing in the Atlantic occurred in Brazil, which netted only several hundred converts.

Though pastors regularly lamented the indifference to the Reformed faith in overseas territories, they also believed that they were harvesting an abundance of souls to true Christianity. This paradox points to the more complex understanding that Dutch Calvinists possessed about conversion than membership rolls suggest. Consistories maintained rigorous standards for church membership, signified by the act of taking communion. Members first had to undergo religious education,

demonstrate comprehension of teachings through an oral examination, and exhibit a lifestyle consistent with Calvinist morals. Yet pastors in many areas outside Batavia baptized people (and all recognized Catholic baptism) without holding them to the more strenuous standards for church membership. Thousands of children and adults were educated in church teaching and practised the Reformed faith in some hybrid fashion, which ministers denounced as vestigial 'paganism' or 'Mohammedanism'. Thus, Calvinist churches and schools had greater local influence beyond those who qualified as church members. Furthermore, pastors collaborated with native linguists to transform oral dialects into written vernaculars, produced a large number of Reformed materials and books of the Bible in local languages, and trained thousands of indigenous teachers who instructed children and adults in the Reformed faith. In addition, lay deacons managed orphanages, poor funds, and other social services in almost every area of Dutch Reformed presence.

In many respects, the seventeenth century marked a Golden Age for Dutch Calvinism. It not only exercised a powerful sway in the Netherlands, but it also rose as the centre of Reformed Protestantism in Europe and the world. Persistent theological conflicts, the appearance of new philosophical approaches, and the decline of the Republic as an international and imperial power eroded the influence of Calvinism in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, its commitment to theological learning, to moral discipline, and to engagement with peoples around the world left an enduring intellectual and moral legacy well into modern times.

Notes

1. Christine Kooi addresses the complexities of religious diversity in Chapter 11. Many thanks to Christine for her careful reading of this chapter.
2. R. B. Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1967, vol. II, 316, 322–3.
3. Michiel van Groesen discusses the relationship between Calvinist missions and global trade in Chapter 9 of this volume.
4. L. J. Rogier, *Eenheid en scheiding. Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Utrecht, 1968, 107.
5. A. Th. van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen. Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarnevelt*, Assen, 1974, 128.
6. J. Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641)*, Manchester, 1999.
7. J. Pollmann, 'Off the Record: Problems in the Quantification of Calvinist Discipline', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33 (2002), 423–38.

8. J. I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806*, Oxford, 1995, 474–5; W. J. op 't Hof, 'Ambivalent Assessments of the Synod of Dordt by Contra-Remonstrants', in Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (eds.), *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1919)*, Leiden, 2011, 391–2.
9. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 660–9.
10. M. Wielema, *The March of the Libertines: Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660–1750)*, Hilversum, 2004, 79–104.
11. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 667–8.
12. H. E. Niemejer, *Calvinisme en koloniale stadscultuur. Batavia 1619–1725*, Amsterdam, 1996, 212; Het Utrechts Archief; Oud Synodaal Archief, XI. Koloniën, Batavia Kerkeraad to South Holland Synod, 14 November 1714, 10 September 1731, 2 November 1732.

Religious Tolerance

Visitors to the Dutch Republic during the Golden Age were often amazed at the variety of religious faiths they found among its inhabitants. The British tourist James Howell, writing in the early part of the seventeenth century, marvelled that 'in this street where I lodge there be well near as many Religions as there be houses, for one neighbour knows not, nor cares not much what religion the other is of'.¹ Others were less favourably impressed; Howell's compatriot Owen Felltham wrote sneeringly a few decades later of the Republic's 'boundless toleration', which allowed anyone there to profess 'what false religion he please'.² Depending on the observer's point of view, the religious toleration that prevailed in the Dutch Republic was a source of either admiration or condemnation. Either way, most contemporaries found it to be a remarkable phenomenon.

There were good reasons why they thought so. In the early modern period of European history, roughly from the Renaissance to the French Revolution, it was conventional wisdom that any state was best off with a citizenry unified in all things, especially religion. Harmony was the paramount social and political virtue. The Protestant Reformation had of course ended the religious unity of medieval Christendom, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many countries struggled with the new problem of religious division within their own populations. Many governments, clinging to traditional understandings of a unified society, tried to resolve religious differences through coercion or imposed uniformity; they attempted, with varying degrees of success, to ensure that all their subjects adhered to the same church. The regents who ruled the United Provinces of the Dutch Republic, however, opted instead for a religious policy of what might be called managed

toleration. They would allow for religious diversity within certain prescribed limits, which they concluded was the best way to promote and preserve social harmony rather than by trying to impose conformity. Consequently, rather than religious uniformity, the Dutch Republic's society in the Golden Age would be characterized by a carefully controlled multi-confessionalism.

Revolt and Reformation

This state of affairs was due in part to the consequences of the religious and political upheavals that had afflicted the Low Countries in the sixteenth century. The Habsburg governments of Spanish kings Charles V and Philip II had reacted swiftly and severely against suspected Protestant religious dissent in their patrimonial lands; more people were executed for heresy in the Netherlands than anywhere else in sixteenth-century Europe. The harshness of this response in turn exacerbated existing unhappiness with Habsburg rule and contributed to the outbreak of the armed revolt against Philip II in the late 1560s. The major group of religious dissenters, known as Reformed Protestants or Calvinists, joined the political opposition of nobles and towns who rejected Habsburg policy. From the start, however, the Revolt against the Habsburgs was troubled by internal conflict. Religious division, particularly between Reformed Christians and Catholics, plagued the rebel coalition repeatedly during the course of the next decade, so much so that no religious settlement could ever be negotiated, and the opposition to the Habsburgs eventually splintered apart. Out of this splintering arose two states, a Catholic southern remnant of the Habsburg Netherlands and an officially Reformed (Calvinist) Dutch Republic.

The Dutch Republic, as it took shape by the late 1580s, was an accidental state that emerged from the exigencies of the war with Habsburg Spain. There were many observers who had expected the northern rebel territories to be eventually reconquered by the Spanish monarchy, but in the end they remained independent. As such, the Republic never had a constitution *per se*; the closest document it had to a constitution was the 1579 Union of Utrecht, a military alliance among the northern insurgent provinces that was never really intended as a final political settlement. Article 13 of the Union stipulated that within

the rebelling provinces the regulation of religion was to be a matter for local authorities, with the proviso that no one was to be 'persecuted or questioned about his religion'.³ What this meant in practice was that the Reformed Church became the official, public church of this new state; that was the price the Calvinists demanded for supporting the rebellion against Philip II. Placards (government edicts) forbidding worship by anyone other than members of the Reformed Church were promulgated throughout the Republic by the 1580s. At the same time, however, authorities required no one to join the public church; freedom of conscience (but not worship) was legally protected. All other confessions, Catholic, Mennonite, and Lutheran most especially, were not allowed to worship openly, but local officials, who had to supervise them, turned a blind eye to their activities as long as they did not disturb the public order. The result was a peculiarity in early modern Europe: a state with a privileged church but a multi-confessional population. Religiously speaking, the Dutch Republic was both Calvinist and pluralist. Behind its Calvinist exterior lay a highly variegated population. Because no governmental authority in the Republic, national, provincial, or local, was willing to coerce belief (at least not consistently), the resulting religious diversity required officials instead to practise a kind of pragmatic toleration.

The Reformed Church was the privileged confession in this new state in that it was the only church allowed to worship publicly. It was given use of most of the buildings that had once belonged to the Catholic Church, its ministers were paid out of publicly administered funds, and its clergy functioned as chaplains for the Republic's armed forces. But, as noted above, no one was obliged to join it, and the Reformed Church itself put up high barriers to membership: one had to profess one's faith publicly and agree to submit to the ecclesiastical discipline of consistories (church councils) of ministers and elders. This meant, in effect, that membership in the public church grew at best slowly over the course of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Reformed Church members were a plurality, rather than a majority, of the Dutch Republic's inhabitants throughout most of the Golden Age. In the first half of the seventeenth century they comprised between 17 and 30 per cent of most civic populations in the province of Holland, at least where numbers are known.⁴ Generally speaking, the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe, and Zeeland were overwhelmingly Protestant (principally Reformed and Mennonite), while Holland,

Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel had more mixed populations, with Catholics making up close to half the inhabitants. This religious variation would obtain throughout the rest of history of the Republic.

What other religions were there besides the Reformed? They included Catholics, Mennonites, Remonstrants, small communities of Lutherans and Jews, and even smaller sects of Quakers, Collegiants, Socinians, and other spiritualist groups. Precise numbers for these groups, during an era that did not think statistically, are impossible to come by, but a local case study can give some impression of the approximate ratios among confessions. Jo Spaans' ground-breaking analysis of the city of Haarlem's religious culture in the period 1577–1620 revealed a civic population that was roughly 20 per cent Reformed, 14 per cent Mennonite, 12.5 per cent Catholic, and 1 per cent Lutheran; the rest of the city's population, more than half, does not appear to have formally aligned with any confession at all.⁵ This does not necessarily mean they did not attend any worship service at all – the Reformed Church had many *liefhebbers*, 'sympathizers' who attended sermons but stopped short of full membership – but it was striking, in such an overtly religious age, that so many Haarlemmers chose not to adhere to a particular confession. No doubt the lack of religious coercion on the government's part contributed to this phenomenon. Spaans' conclusions seem to reflect what has been found in most other Dutch towns as well: by the middle of the century the Reformed inhabitants made up a plurality of the municipal population, with minority confessions ranging anywhere from 1 per cent to 30 per cent, plus a substantial number of unaffiliated citizens. The major exception to this general pattern were the Generality Lands in the south, the parts of the provinces of Flanders, Brabant, and Limburg that had fallen within the Republic's territory by right of military conquest in the early 1600s. Populations there remained overwhelmingly Catholic, and the Reformed Church had little success in converting inhabitants to the public church.⁶

Particular mention should be made of the Dutch Republic's largest non-Christian minority, the Jews. Sephardic or Portuguese Jews first established themselves in the Republic, mostly in Amsterdam, in the 1590s, and at their peak in the later seventeenth century numbered around 3,000. They were joined in the second half of the century by several thousand Ashkenazi Jews from central and eastern Europe.⁷ The Republic, along with the Ottoman Empire and a handful of

Italian states, was one of the few places in Europe where expelled Iberian Jews could find a relatively safe haven in the early modern era. Prejudice against Jews had a long history in Christian Europe, where they were traditionally seen as the killers of Christ. Jewish settlement in the towns of Holland was certainly viewed with wariness and suspicion, especially by the public church, and it was not until the latter part of the Golden Age that they were granted the right to build their own houses of worship. Unlike other religious minorities in the Republic, Jews were obligated to ask permission from magistrates first before they could settle in a given town. Nor were they permitted to marry Christians. In the long term, however, local authorities treated their Jewish communities little differently from Christian minority groups and subjected them to the same constraints and supervision.

Public Church and Private Faiths

The Reformed Church occupied its place in the Dutch Republic, that of a privileged church in a multi-confessional society, with occasional unease. It expected deference and authority as the public church, but its relationship with governmental authorities, local, provincial, and national, could be decidedly complicated. It wanted both independence and support from state authority. That is, the public church wanted no political interference but plenty of political leeway. The Reformed leadership believed that the church should govern its own affairs as well as lead the general moral reformation of society, and it expected the government to support it in these efforts unconditionally. Government officials, for their part, expected the public church to defer to their power; they preferred a privileged church that was both subservient and unifying. These differences in understanding about the place and nature of the public church led, in the early decades of the 1570s and 1580s, to some bitter local conflicts in the provinces of Holland and Utrecht between church and civic leaders about how much autonomy the public church should enjoy, especially on the thorny question of how ministers and consistories were to be appointed. These conflicts would be settled locally in various ways, but the issues behind them would replay themselves again, more seriously, a generation later in the 1610s with the Arminian controversies during the Twelve Years' Truce. After 1619, when the Arminian or Remonstrant faction was expelled

from the public church and Reformed orthodoxy prevailed within its congregations, the relationship between church and state settled down into a more or less amicable, or at least less antagonistic, pattern. The public church accepted its status as privileged but not independent.

The wariness with which the government and the privileged church viewed each other, especially in the first half-century or so of the Republic's history, had a direct impact on how the country's other confessions were treated. That other confessions were tolerated, however begrudgingly at times, within what the Reformed Church's leaders called their 'New Israel' was a source of continued dismay to them, and they complained about it frequently. But for public officials, unwilling to impose religious conformity, some toleration became necessary as long as the Reformed Church set such high bars for membership. Unhappy memories of the sixteenth-century Inquisition may have also contributed to their reluctance to coerce belief. Governmental officials, however, did expect that these private congregations would defer to their authority, as they had expected the Reformed Church to do. In practice, this eventually worked out to local magistrates usually leaving tolerated congregations alone as long as they did not disturb community order or become too obvious about their worship and ceremonies. The motives for their policy of toleration were thus more pragmatic than principled. They opted to accommodate pluriformity rather than impose conformity in part because the first option seemed more practicable than the latter. In effect what local authorities across the Republic set up was a kind of 'regime of toleration' that managed confessional coexistence in a more or less effective fashion.⁸

The Regime of Toleration

This regime of toleration evolved, bumpily and haphazardly, during the first fifty years or so of the Dutch Republic's existence. Not only did local magistracies have to figure out what their relationship with the privileged Reformed Church was, they also had to determine their policy towards the confessional minorities inside their communities. The placards outlawed worship by anyone but members of the Reformed Church, but in private minority congregations established themselves fairly quickly by the 1580s and 1590s. Town councils and sheriffs enforced the placards inconsistently, sometimes bowing to the

pressure of the Reformed Church to do something about dissenters, and sometimes not. Up until the 1610s there seems to have been a general wariness among civic authorities about allowing dissenters too much leeway in their activities. This wariness likely stemmed from both Reformed pressure and the authorities' ingrained suspicion of anything that might cause disorder within their communities. Lutheran and Mennonite congregations, for example, faced a certain degree of suspicion when petitioning officials to allow them to secure private places of worship, and in some cases officials forbade them outright to gather in 'conventicles'. Portuguese Jews likewise initially had difficulty establishing a synagogue for themselves in Amsterdam, in part because of Reformed lobbying against the idea.⁹ The town government of Leiden banned Lutheran services within the city walls in the 1590s when that congregation's internal conflicts about certain points of doctrine led to street confrontations.¹⁰ Similarly, Catholics were subject to far more magisterial attention and prosecution in this period; priests and missionaries had to operate clandestinely at times, travelling in disguise, conducting correspondence in code and relying on well-to-do lay Catholic patrons to protect them.¹¹

By the 1610s there came to be a gradual easing of governmental wariness towards minority religions. This decade saw a temporary truce with Spain, diminishing the pressures of war and thus moderating suspicions of dissenters. This easing may have also been due in part to the Arminian controversies that convulsed both the state and the public church in this decade. Local governments and Reformed consistories became so embroiled in the local conflicts between Arminians and Gomarists in church and state that they paid less attention to confessional dissenters. Also, in several important towns in the province of Holland there came to power pro-Arminian magistrates who were more inclined towards toleration – minority confessions seeking permission to purchase a building in which to worship were granted their requests by Arminian town governments. Congregations of Jews, Mennonites, and Lutherans, especially across Holland, found themselves finally being given the permission to secure permanent places of worship, provided of course that they did not in any way intrude upon public order.

The result was a rather peculiar religious topography that emerged in most of the communities of the Republic by the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Members of the Reformed Church worshipped

openly in the proud, centuries-old medieval churches that formed the heart of each town, while Catholics, Mennonites, and Lutherans gathered informally and quietly to worship in private homes scattered throughout the crowded, narrow streets of those self-same towns, sometimes in close proximity to the public church. One of the most famous examples of this proximity is Amsterdam's Our Dear Lord in the Attic (*Ons' Lieve Heer op Zolder*), a Catholic chapel hidden behind a typical gabled canal house right around the corner from the medieval Old Church where the city's Reformed population worshipped. Similarly, the Lutherans of Leiden gathered in their own nondescript 'preaching house' just a short walk down the canal from the late gothic Highland Church controlled by the Calvinists. Such close physical arrangements repeated themselves all over the crowded towns and cities of the Republic. The 'secrecy' of these private congregations was, however, a kind of polite fiction: although these worship spaces were placed behind innocuous façades, everyone in a given community, including the local authorities, seemed to know where the non-Reformed Christians in town gathered. Within the Republic's civic spaces there seems to have been a largely unspoken social and political arrangement that, as long as the minority confessions minded their own business and worshipped quietly, they would remain unmolested.

Confessional Coexistence

By the 1620s, the regime of toleration began to stabilize. Religious minorities still remained at a legal disadvantage. They enjoyed freedom of conscience but not freedom of worship (though the placards against worship continued to be at best inconsistently enforced). Local officials did on occasion harass Catholic congregations and priests but did so in an unpredictable and irregular fashion. The Reformed Church kept up its sectarian rhetoric and lobbying, especially against Catholics, but even that was on the wane by the last quarter of the seventeenth century. As generations passed, and after the war with Habsburg Spain ended, the urgency of confessional friction slowly dwindled. A kind of peaceful coexistence settled on the multi-confessional society of the Dutch Republic by the later Golden Age; antagonism and discord among confessions could erupt, but did so without serious destabilization of the social order.

Because the Union of Utrecht had stipulated that the regulation of religious affairs be kept in local hands, there was inevitably some variation in the enforcement of the regime of toleration across the country, from community to community. Much depended on the disposition of local magistrates, the co-operation and obedience of the tolerated congregations, the degree of sectarian feeling in the local Reformed congregation, and countless other social, geographic, economic, political, and even personal factors. The toleration that the various minority confessions enjoyed was neither constant nor consistent. It was changeable and extremely sensitive to local circumstances. Toleration in the Dutch Republic was therefore more of a process than a condition.

The most important variation in the regime of toleration was regional. The security and stability of minority congregations could vary from town to town and province to province. The province of Holland, the Republic's most populous and most prosperous, was the most liberal in its actions towards religious minorities. In most of the communities of Holland, especially in the cosmopolitan merchant city of Amsterdam, local magistrates gave the tolerated congregations a relatively wide latitude to worship as they wished, provided again that they did so in private and without causing disturbance. In provinces further east, however, treatment of confessional minorities was more restrictive. Starting in the 1620s and continuing through the rest of the century, eastern cities such as Utrecht, Deventer, Arnhem, Zwolle, and Nijmegen introduced laws excluding Catholics from becoming municipal citizens (citizenship in the Dutch Republic was local rather than national, and as a legal status it conferred certain economic and social privileges). These eastern towns did not enjoy the same high level of prosperity of those of Holland, and town councils there may have given in to pressure by both the Reformed Church and their own populations, who were resentful of perceived outsiders during hard economic times. Even within latitudinarian Holland there were local variations, degrees of tolerance or intolerance, among communities. The cities of Dordrecht and Gouda saw more prosecution of Catholics by local law officers for violating the placards during the Golden Age than other cities in the province. Dordrecht had a large and influential Reformed congregation that enjoyed a close relationship with civic authorities, and more than once it successfully lobbied the sheriff to crack down on Catholic conventicles within the town walls.

Gouda's bailiff (its principal law officer) appears to have succumbed to greed, raiding Catholic meetings there in hopes of extracting more recognition money (a cross between a fine and a bribe) from priests.¹² Confessional minorities, especially Catholics, found that the regime of toleration did not completely shield them from political or legal harassment anywhere in the Republic. They remained, in some important respects, second-class citizens.

There were also variations in the regime of toleration as to how it treated different religious groups. The Protestant minorities tended to enjoy more toleration, or at least less harassment, than Roman Catholics. Congregations of Mennonite Christians, for example, who generally kept to themselves and practised a degree of deliberate self-segregation from the rest of society, were largely left alone by authorities, who welcomed their economic energies. Indeed, to some degree their beliefs were even accommodated. The States of Holland, for example, promulgated a policy of allowing Mennonites to make promises instead of swearing oaths on various legal occasions such as becoming a citizen or marrying; oath-taking violated a core tenet of their doctrines. Mennonites also refused to take up arms, and so in some cities they were allowed to pay a fee rather than participate in civic militias. Though as a minority they did not enjoy complete immunity; in the 1660s and 1670s various Mennonite communities throughout the Republic were interrogated by local officials about whether there were those who harboured Socinian sentiments (a belief denying the existence of the Christian Trinity) within their membership.¹³ Likewise, the country's tiny Lutheran minority, made up principally of migrants from the Holy Roman Empire, was generally left alone by authorities. But it too came under closer government scrutiny on occasion. Calvinist fears that the Lutherans might collude with the Remonstrants in the 1640s and 1650s led to some attempts by some city governments to issue edicts preventing the expansion of Lutheran worship. The Great Assembly of 1651 went so far as to deny Lutherans the right to hold public office.

Of all the tolerated confessions, Catholics were the most likely to receive ill treatment from the authorities, at least in part because of Protestant anti-Catholic bias, but also because the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy very deliberately organized a missionary effort to bring hundreds of priests into the Republic to revive Catholic worship there. This project, known as the Holland Mission, operated semi-secretly and with substantial success – it provided Dutch Catholics

with both pastoral care and the sacraments.¹⁴ The presence and activities of the Mission provoked the alarm of the Reformed Church, which lobbied governments hard to do something to stop the rise of 'popery'. Though it occasionally raised objections to Mennonite activities, the privileged church's sectarian animus was most sharply directed at the surviving remnant of those still faithful to the old Catholic Church, the church that the Calvinists believed they had reformed. The survival of what the Reformed leadership termed 'idolatry' was regarded as both offensive and harmful, both to true religion and to the commonwealth. Consistories, *classes*, and synods (the hierarchy of councils that made up the administration of the Reformed Church) complained loudly and frequently to municipal and provincial governments about the 'impudence' of the 'papists'. Reformed authorities launched a rhetorical war against Catholicism that lasted most of the Golden Age but reached its peak between about 1620 and 1660, as Catholic worship underwent a considerable revival thanks to the efforts of the Holland Mission. Reformed divines reviled Catholicism in the pulpit and in print in the most hyperbolic and visceral terms: its presence in the Republic was a 'cancer', a 'serpent', or a 'wolf'. Equally infuriating to them was how the Catholics manipulated the regime of toleration, how they brazenly went about practising their 'idolatry' in the midst of the community, with magistrates doing little if anything to stop them despite the laws on the books.¹⁵ The regime of toleration often exasperated the Reformed Church, precisely because it permitted Catholic worship in a land the Reformed believed they had won for themselves. As a consequence, a strident and often fierce anti-Catholicism became one of the hallmarks of the culture of the early modern Dutch Reformed Church. Part of its very identity lay in the fact that it stood against the 'superstition' and 'idolatry' of the Church of Rome.

The multi-confessionalism that prevailed within the society of the Dutch Republic, therefore, often left the Reformed Church discomfited. Consistories, *classes*, and synods were watchful guardians of the boundaries between it and the tolerated confessions. Ministers and elders were quick to react against anything that seemed to them like confessional mixing. In the crowded towns of the Republic, it was easy enough to encounter and interact with people who were not members of the Reformed Church. If consistories, which were responsible for disciplining church members, learned that a congregant was consorting with people of another confession she would likely be summoned by the

ministers and elders to explain her actions and demonstrate her doctrinal loyalty. In the large congregation of Amsterdam, for example, such cases of confessional straying came before the consistory several times a year. A similar pattern could be found among other Reformed congregations across the country. Ministers and elders would threaten to prevent straying church members from attending communion, and the truly recalcitrant could even be excommunicated (though this happened rarely). Ecclesiastical discipline had varying effects; sometimes church members admitted their errors and reconciled with the church, but some did not. In 1649 Trijn Hendrickxdr of Delft, for example, contritely told the consistory in that city that her husband had forced her to attend Catholic mass, but now she had divorced him, and so the consistory welcomed her back. Amsterdam church member Aeltgen Claes, on the other hand, had been accused of consorting with Catholics in 1601; she rejected repeated attempts by the consistory to reason with her and publicly denounced the Reformed faith, even repeating the age-old Catholic rumour that the reformer John Calvin had been guilty of sodomy.¹⁶

The Competition for Souls

Cases like Trijn's and Aeltgen's reveal another aspect of the Republic's multi-confessionalism that unsettled the privileged church: because there was no coercion of belief, individuals could survey the range of religions available and choose one over the other. Despite the various confessions' efforts to guard their boundaries, it was very possible for a person to move from one confessional allegiance to another or even to abandon any religious conviction altogether. One confession's convert became another's apostate. This meant that a kind of competition for souls existed among the various religious groups of the Republic. If you were looking for religion, one English contemporary noted, 'you may try all here, and take at last what you like best'.¹⁷ And that is precisely what some people did. In 1672 the Catholic husband of a Delft Reformed Church member, for example, had been preventing his wife from attending Reformed services. When the consistory admonished him about this, he proposed to the elders a scheme whereby his wife would attend 'his' church six times and he would attend 'hers' six times, and then they would choose between the two churches. The consistory

rejected such a proposal out of hand, but a few months later it learned, much to its surprise and pleasure, that the husband had been attending Reformed worship and found it 'to his taste'.¹⁸ The competition for souls sometimes worked to a given confession's advantage.

Precisely because of cases like these, one particular type of confessional interaction that all church authorities were especially vigilant about was mixed or interfaith marriage. There were no legal impediments to mixed marriage in the Dutch Republic except between Christians and Jews. Certainly clergy of all the confessions strongly preferred that members marry those within their own denomination. Reformed consistories actively discouraged mixed marriages, and if a Reformed Church member went ahead and married someone of a different confession, they often pressured the couple to make sure that any child born of the union would be baptized in the Reformed Church. Catholic priests likewise strongly encouraged their parishioners to marry and baptize within the church. Sometimes this competition for new souls led to direct conflict between confessions. In Gouda in 1669, for example, an alarmed Reformed consistory persuaded the town council to intervene when a Franciscan missionary priest forced a church member to marry her Catholic fiancé according to his church's rites. The magistrates ordered the husband to allow the child they were expecting to be baptized in the Reformed Church. Since Mennonites practised adult baptism only, Reformed consistories were particularly fearful that infants from such interfaith marriages would remain unbaptized. When a Mennonite wife fled her Reformed husband in Leiden in 1586 to prevent their child from being baptized, the consistory intervened vigorously to get the city magistrates involved in the case. Such conflict between confessions within the intimate sphere of families could be particularly fraught. All parties concerned saw the disposition of newborn souls at stake. Church leaders of any confession had to handle such cases with a certain degree of delicacy, but, as we have seen, the Reformed Church did not hesitate to enlist the power of the government when necessary.

Everyday Ecumenism

The phenomenon of interfaith marriages pointed to a larger social fact about the Dutch Republic: interacting with people of a different

confession during the mundane realities of everyday life was very common, even unavoidable. As the British travellers cited in the beginning of this chapter noted, neighbourhoods and even families in communities across the Republic included a diverse array of religious believers. Authorities did not require religious minorities to segregate themselves. Sometimes minority faiths might concentrate themselves in a few particular blocks of a town, such as the Jews in Amsterdam or the Catholics in Delft, but these neighbourhoods cannot be described as ghettos as they were not in any way gated or walled off from the rest of the city. Despite all the hostile and even violent rhetoric the various confessions sometimes directed at each other, there were very few recorded instances of actual violence among ordinary people of different beliefs, even though they often lived cheek by jowl with each other. Neighbours tended to get along with each other, and they either ignored or overlooked confessional allegiance in their dealings with others. This social interaction has been called by one noted historian 'interconfessional conviviality' or the 'ecumenicism of everyday relations'.¹⁹ Members of different religions lived near each other, worked with each other, and were even related to each other without very much fuss being made about the beliefs that separated them. Benjamin Kaplan points to a vivid example of this in Rembrandt's 1662 group portrait of the five Syndics of Amsterdam's Drapers' Guild, a painting later made famous as a logo for 'Dutch Masters' cigars; the subjects of the portrait included members of at least four different confessions: Reformed, Mennonite, Catholic, and Remonstrant (Figure 11.1). These were men of high station within the city's merchant world, and they had no difficulty working together for common profitable ends.²⁰ Judith Pollmann has described the life of the devout Utrecht Calvinist Arnoldus Buchelius, a lawyer and scholar who despite his personally fierce sectarianism counted Catholics and Remonstrants among his circle of friends.²¹ Individuals in this multi-confessional society were clearly able to separate their own private religious convictions from their relationships with friends, neighbours, and kin. Deeply held religious allegiance did not automatically interfere with or preclude personal interaction. This willingness to overlook difference, to lay aside one's prejudices, was the lubricant that allowed the variegated social world of the Dutch Republic to function smoothly.

This personal, day-to-day ecumenism may have been the real triumph of the Dutch Republic's tolerationist regime. In their effort to manage religious coexistence, the regents of the Republic effectively



Figure 11.1 Rembrandt, *The Syndics*, 1662.

encouraged the formation of two separate spheres when it came to religion – a public one and a private one. In the minds of the political elites who developed this regime, belief reigned in the private sphere while worship belonged to the public realm. Thus, only one church could be public and worship openly, but all consciences and convictions were private and therefore inviolate. In effect what the religious settlement of the Dutch Republic did was privatize religion, allowing people of different beliefs to worship God as they chose within carefully circumscribed parameters. Despite occasional protests and jostlings, the public church and the minority confessions more or less acquiesced to this regime. Its permutations varied from time to time and place to place, but on the whole it functioned relatively smoothly, and a peaceful coexistence prevailed. The regime of toleration did its job: it allowed for religious diversity while at the same time maintaining social harmony.

This managed toleration was, to be sure, not the same thing as the modern conception of freedom of religion, rooted in the Enlightenment notion of individual rights. ‘Toleration’, in the early modern understanding of the word, meant mere sufferance or allowance; the Dutch Republic allowed religious minorities to dwell within its borders. There was a certain air of condescension about the term – it was, as one

historian has neatly put it, a 'loser's creed', a status imposed by the winners on the losers of the religious wars.²² There was in the lively intellectual culture of the Golden Age a fairly broad conversation among philosophers, jurists, and theologians about the question of religious liberty, but that theoretical discussion had little practical effect on how religious minorities were actually treated.²³ Toleration, in the case of the Republic, was a power relationship. Certainly the minority confessions who were the objects of this regime did not feel free, given their legal status and the general animosity of the Reformed Church. Their consciences may have been free, but their worship was constrained. Full emancipation for religious minorities would come only in 1795, when French armies conquered the Low Countries in a far more revolutionary era. Until then, the minority confessions in the Dutch Republic were tolerated rather than free, and religious diversity was managed rather than celebrated.

Notes

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2. O. Felltham, *A Brief Character of the Low Countries Under the States*, London, 1677, 53.
3. 'Treaty of the Union', in E. H. Kossmann and A. F. Mellink (eds.), *Texts Concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, Cambridge, 1974, 169–70.
4. C. Kooi, *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation, 1572–1620*, Leiden, 2000, 212.
5. J. Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie. Stedelijke cultuur en kerkelijk leven, 1577–1620*, The Hague, 1989, 104.
6. J. Spohnholz, 'Confessional Coexistence in the Early Modern Netherlands', in T. M. Safley (ed.), *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, Leiden, 2011, 57–8.
7. J. I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806*, Oxford, 1995, 376, 657–8.
8. This phrase was coined in M. Walzer, *On Toleration*, New Haven, 1997, 14–36.
9. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 372–7.
10. Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*, 171–4.
11. C. H. Parker, *Faith on the Margins: Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age*, Cambridge, MA, 2008, 46–58.
12. C. Kooi, *Calvinists and Catholics During Holland's Golden Age: Heretics and Idolaters*, Cambridge, 2012, 90–129.
13. S. Zijlstra, *Over de ware gemeente en de oude gronden. Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden 1531–1675*, Hilversum, 2000, 477–8.

14. C. Kooi, "'A Serpent in the Bosom of Our Dear Fatherland': Reformed Reaction to the Holland Mission in the Seventeenth Century', in A.-J. Gelderblom et al. (eds.), *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs*, Leiden, 2004, 165–76.
15. H. Roodenburg, *Onder censuur. De kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam 1578–1700*, Hilversum, 1990, 146–204.
16. Roodenburg, *Onder censuur*, 163.
17. Felltham, *A Brief Character*, 53.
18. Kooi, *Calvinists and Catholics*, 131.
19. W. Frijhoff, 'The Threshold of Toleration: Interconfessional Conviviality in Holland During the Early Modern Period', in W. Frijhoff (ed.), *Embodied Belief: Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History*, Hilversum, 2002, 39–40.
20. B. J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, MA, 2007, 237–8.
21. J. Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641)*, Manchester, 1999.
22. A. Pettegree, 'The Politics of Toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572–1620', in O. P. Grell and B. Scribner (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, Cambridge, 1996, 182–98.
23. J. I. Israel, 'The Intellectual Debate About Toleration in the Dutch Republic', in C. Berkvens-Stevelinck et al. (eds.), *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, Leiden, 1997, 3–36.

Spiritual Culture

The cultural vibrancy of the 'Golden Age' can in large part be attributed to the extraordinary religious diversity of the Dutch cities. As previous chapters have shown, the upheavals of the Reformation and Revolt resulted in a fragmented populace. Added to this was explosive growth due to the arrival of tens of thousands of immigrants and refugees. This created an extremely challenging situation – one that is remarkably familiar to us today – in urban, cosmopolitan settings especially, everyday social relations involved interacting with numerous strangers. Visitors to Dutch cities found this disconcerting and regularly commented on it. As one of them wrote: 'It is well known ... that in addition to the Reformed, there are Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Brownists, Independents, Arminians, Anabaptists, Socinians, Arians, Enthusiasts, Quakers, Borelists, Muscovites, Libertines, and many more ... I am not even speaking of the Jews, Turks, and Persians.'¹ Another traveller exclaimed, 'I believe in this street where I lodge there be well near as many Religions as there be houses', and concluded that 'no part of Europe is so haunted with all sorts of foreigners as the Netherlands'.² While this may have been somewhat exaggerated, it indicates how neighbourhoods were comprised of households of various faiths. For residents, relating to such an array of others became an ordinary occurrence. Like today, some felt threatened by the effects of migration and the prospect of living so closely with all manner of people. There were proposals for segregation and expulsion, and there was religious persecution and violence, although remarkably little given the strains of adjusting to unprecedented diversity. In spite of these negative responses, however, religious heterogeneity generated a great deal of creativity. Cultural producers – poets, playwrights,

printers, painters, sculptors, and architects – were faced with the challenge of taking into account the sheer variety of their potential audience. Very few addressed their work exclusively to one confessional group or spiritual sect. Instead, they often deliberately de-emphasized potentially divisive religious differences in efforts to cultivate urban peace and prosperity, experimenting with innovative cultural forms that could appeal simultaneously to more than one faith. Scholars frequently overlook the spiritual aspects of this broad and open-ended shared culture; the connections between Dutch painting and religion, for instance, remain underexplored. This chapter seeks to redress this oversight by assessing various forms of cultural production in relation to the social reality of religious dissention. Not surprisingly, there were contradictory outcomes: the dynamics of Dutch spiritual culture can be characterized as a vacillation between creative inclusiveness and hostile divisiveness. Culture, in other words, became a predominant means to manage the daily tensions and anxieties of migration, diversity, and encounters among strangers.

Mixing with Heathens: Hospitality and Hostility Towards Jews, Muslims and Other Heretics

This chapter begins not by considering the dominant group – the Calvinist or Reformed Church – but by looking to the margins with the expectation that peripheral or dissident culture often reveals quite a lot about the mainstream. Jews and Muslims (or ‘Turks’ as the latter were called) were emphatically defined as outsiders. A catechism book used by Dutch schoolchildren summarized Reformed doctrine about non-Christian sects in an easily memorizable question-and-answer format:

Question: Name one of these false religions.

Answer: The heathens, today’s Jewish, Muslim, or Turkish religion.³

While this was the teaching, in actual practice, the situation was much less cut and dried. In the sphere of culture, imposed dogmas were not rigidly upheld, and there was a great deal of reciprocity between religious groups that were considered doctrinally incompatible.



Figure 12.1 Emanuel de Witte, *Portuguese Synagogue*, 1680.

A painting by Dutch artist Emanuel de Witte, *Portuguese Synagogue* (Figure 12.1), permits us to see much that was extraordinary about the spiritual culture of the Dutch Republic. The work was commissioned and owned by a member of the Jewish congregation and depicts the interior of the synagogue, called the Esnoga, of Amsterdam's Portuguese Sephardic Jewish community during a service.⁴ It is a busy scene, filled with many figures. Jewish men in prayer shawls attend to the reading of the Torah, while the women are barely visible as silhouettes in the screened balconies. A shaft of sunlight highlights a man and woman conversing in the foreground, bringing out the gold in their hair as if to accentuate their non-Jewishness. In fact, the group of

women, men, and children who stand looking on are Gentiles. Dutch and European sightseers regularly came to observe the rites and to marvel at something that still astonishes: Amsterdam's Jewish community was granted permission by the town government to build this monumental public synagogue. As discussed in Chapter 11, due to pragmatic policies of religious toleration, Dutch cities, most notably Amsterdam, were something of a haven for Jews fleeing persecution elsewhere in Europe. They became a sizeable – and visible – group in the city. This did not go uncontested: some of the most orthodox Calvinist leaders protested strenuously. Even so, the city government eventually approved repeated petitions to build a synagogue in which the Jewish congregation convincingly argued that they were a peaceable community and contributed significantly to Dutch prosperity. The exceptionality of the Esnoga is why it attracted so many tourists, such as the group pictured by De Witte. It was probably the most-visited site in Amsterdam, and more than one visitor exclaimed that this was the largest synagogue in Europe, possibly the whole world. To this day, the Esnoga, along with the adjacent Ashkenazi synagogues, today's Jewish Historical Museum, stand as monuments to the long-established prominence of Jewish communities in the Netherlands.

The Esnoga also attests to the significance of Jewish cultural patronage. The architect commissioned to execute the grandiose building was the master builder Elias Bouman. Like the painter De Witte, Bouman was a Dutchman with no Jewish background – a Gentile working for Jewish clients. The Jews themselves were not permitted to work as architects or artists. Not considered members of the civic community, they were barred from joining the guilds that oversaw the work of various professions. However, the Sephardic community was one of the wealthiest in Amsterdam, and this meant that it could – and did – exercise influential cultural patronage. Like the Dutch mercantile elites, the Portuguese Jews made their money in the rapidly expanding global luxury market; they were actively involved in a lucrative trading triangle that joined Lisbon to Brazil to Amsterdam. There is evidence of these prosperous connections in De Witte's picture: the massive ark of the Torah, or *hechal*, visible at the back of the scene, was made from expensive imported Brazilian Jacaranda wood.

The presence of this wealthy Jewish community textured the cultural fabric of Amsterdam. Besides the synagogue, they built gracious canal houses in town, and stately country homes in fashionable suburban

areas, which were designed, built, and decorated by the foremost architects, builders, and craftsmen of the day. Many of these residences also became tourist destinations – there are several accounts of visitors who went to witness customs such as circumcision (about which there was a great deal of curiosity), and to see the artworks and other curiosities that these homes contained. The collection of the textile and diamond merchant Alphonso Lopez, for instance, boasted paintings by Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, and a number of other Dutch artists. Wealthy Portuguese Jews such as Lopez actively participated in the cultural practices of a pan-European elite, and such international patronage of the arts certainly stimulated the artistic vitality of Amsterdam.

To take the most famous example, Rembrandt had many Jewish neighbours and his everyday encounters with them had a notable impact on his work. While there is a long-standing and overly romanticized myth about Rembrandt as a compassionate friend of the Jews, recent studies have shown that his relations with his neighbours were at times cordial, at times contentious.⁵ And it is important to keep in mind that living among the Jews did not just provide colourful subject matter for Rembrandt's art – the Sephardim were patrons and collectors of his work and accordingly shaped what he produced. This too was the case with De Witte and Bouman, who adapted their usual working practices to attain understanding of synagogue architecture and unfamiliar religious rites. A number of other Dutch artists, such as the well-known landscape painter Jacob van Ruysdael and the internationally renowned engraver Romeyn de Hooghe, also created pictures that catered specifically to the interests of their Jewish clients. What this indicates is a cultural context that fostered creative interchanges between Jews and Gentiles, while allowing Jewish immigrants to maintain a distinctive religious identity.

All of this shifts our assumptions about what was central and what was peripheral within the sphere of spiritual culture. Jewish cultural activity was not separate from the rest of Dutch culture, but entangled with it. Although a marginal outsider group, the Portuguese Jewish community stimulated a great deal of cultural production, and their homes and places of worship were important sites of encounter between peoples of differing religions. The Jews were perceived as foreign and heathen, yet they were among the cultural elite, important patrons and collectors of the arts. The reactions of a French tourist are representative of the vacillating and contradictory reactions that this evoked. He



Figure 12.2 Gerrit Berckheyde, *Dam Square*, 1672.

begins his account by stating: ‘the Jewish synagogue is a very grand edifice, they are also very numerous here. That damned race is forever appearing in front of me in the streets.’ This type of anxious hostility was no doubt typical, but so are his next comments: after a visit to a Jewish home, he concedes that his host was extremely gracious and truly an *honnête homme*, an honest, cultivated gentleman of the world – like the Frenchman himself.⁶ Foreign and other, yet familiar and close, the Jews were perceived as both strangers and neighbours and thus met with a mix of hostility and hospitality.

Muslims had a similar status as outsiders who were both welcomed and reviled. While they did not settle in large numbers like the Jews, many Muslims visited the port cities especially. Looking closely at the staffage figures that populate a bustling scene of Amsterdam’s Dam Square in a painting by Gerrit Berckheyde (Figure 12.2), we can discern turbaned men mingling in the crowd. Stock figures in many paintings of public spaces, these visible foreigners most likely represent merchants, traders, or diplomats. As with the Jews, their presence had

transformative potential. The story of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Muhammad provides an illustration of the kinds of cross-cultural exchanges that could occur.⁷ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was part of a Moroccan diplomatic deputation sent to Holland by the Muslim king Mulay Zaydān. The Moroccans and the Dutch had a common enemy – both were at war with Spain – and a common goal – to promote ‘firm and sure neighbourliness’ in order to foster prosperous trade relations. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s ‘curious clothes’ attracted the attention of the Dutchman Jan Theunisz, who approached the Moroccan man in the streets and struck up a conversation – in Arabic, surprisingly enough.

Theunisz was a printer who had studied Arabic at Leiden University. He also was a member of Amsterdam’s Mennonite community. The Mennonites or Anabaptists were a radical religious group that formed in the Protestant Reformation. Harshly persecuted in the sixteenth century for extremist beliefs such as their rejection of infant baptism, this non-conformist sect was cautiously tolerated by the seventeenth century. Theunisz invited ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to reside with him, exchanging room and board for instruction in Arabic. Among the scholars who attended these lessons were the Englishmen Matthew Slade, Calvinist rector of Amsterdam’s Latin School, and John Paget, who had studied Arabic at Cambridge University and was pastor of Amsterdam’s English Reformed congregation. Religion and religious differences were central topics of their cross-cultural Arabic conversations. Theunisz later wrote a summary of their lively debates about ‘the Christian religion and the Quran’, highlighting points of commonality as well as irreconcilable differences.⁸ Before he departed, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz gave a manuscript of the Quran to Theunisz as a gift of thanks for his hospitality. It seems that his sojourn among the Christians served to reinforce ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s faith, as he set sail directly for Medina on pilgrimage to the burial place of the prophet Muhammad. This example gives us a fascinating glimpse of how everyday urban encounters between peoples from different parts of the world could stimulate deeper understandings among divergent religious cultures while simultaneously sharpening awareness of incompatible beliefs.

Such exchanges had important cultural reverberations, some of which can be traced through the subsequent career of Theunisz. The language skills he gained from a winter in conversation with ‘Abd al-‘Azīz were so impressive that he was hired to teach Arabic at Leiden University. He had also mastered Hebrew, fostered in part by

connections with Amsterdam's Jewish community, and in 1617 Theunis was appointed professor of Hebrew at Amsterdam's Dutch Academy. His profession as a printer allowed him to publish a number of books in both Arabic and Hebrew, and he also did important translation work for the state. In spite of his significant contributions, Reformed church leaders protested Theunis's academic appointments, resulting in the dismissal of this 'dissenting Mennonite'.

Theunis's involvement in public life was curtailed because of his Mennonite beliefs, not his interest in Jewish and Muslim cultures, which were part of a larger academic trend. A number of scholars at the universities and academies advocated study of the Quran and the Torah as well as language training in Arabic and Hebrew, knowledge that certainly fed into Dutch scholarship. The impetus for opening up these areas of study was not disinterested. An oft-repeated rationale that resonates with the catechism teaching and tourist reactions cited above was that an understanding of Islam and Judaism was important for the mission of converting heathens who were otherwise damned. Informed debate based on familiarity with the languages and sacred texts of 'false religions' was advocated as a means of conversion that would be more effective than the violent and coercive methods of the Spanish Inquisition. Again, we notice how hospitality and neighbourliness were combined with dogmatism and intolerance towards outsiders, even those who were active agents in Dutch cultural life.

While there was unusual acceptance of Jews and Muslims, especially those involved in commerce and diplomacy, there was far less toleration if heresy was suspected of Dutch cultural producers. The spiritual diversity of the cities also included esoteric practices such as magic and alchemy. A notorious example is the Haarlem artist Johannes Torrentius, who was interrogated, tortured, tried, and sentenced to death (which was later commuted to twenty years' imprisonment) for 'his atheism, abominable and awful blasphemy, together with his shocking and harmful heresy'.⁹ Besides denying God and the authority of scripture, Torrentius experimented with a peculiar (and unexplained) technique of painting, producing images that were considered works of magic. These artworks were considered so dangerous that a number of them were publicly destroyed. While this is an extreme case, it does indicate that religious tolerance had limits, and cultural practices deemed sacrilegious could be dealt with quite harshly.

Hiding in Plain Sight: The Accommodation of Roman Catholics and Other Dissenters

A distinctive feature of Dutch spiritual culture is the fact that even though the Reformed Church was the politically endorsed public sect, in many cities and towns, professing Calvinists were outnumbered by dissenters of various stripes. The Roman Catholics – who had previously dominated social, political, religious, and cultural life – remained an especially substantial group. The problem of how to deal with such a large opposing faction as well as the influx of immigrants without instigating ongoing religious violence was an urgent challenge. The main solution was to allow limited continuity of Roman Catholic customs and to extend the same privileges to other sects. Who better to sum up this situation than the Moroccan-born Jewish rabbi, Isaac Uziel, with the observation that: ‘people live peaceably in Amsterdam. The inhabitants of this city, mindful of the increase in population, make laws and ordinances whereby the freedom of religions may be upheld . . . Each may follow his own belief, but may not openly show that he is a different faith from the inhabitants of the city.’¹⁰

This peaceable approach was purposefully cultivated in the realm of culture. Long prior to the Reformation and Revolt, the cultural life of the cities and towns had been dominated by Roman Catholic Chambers of Rhetoric, societies whose activities included the writing, recitation, and performance of plays and poetry, and participation in public festivities and civic competitions. The membership was mainly from the broad middle classes and drew many artists and skilled craftsmen as well as playwrights and poets. The Chambers were allowed to continue in the seventeenth century, but no longer as solely Catholic societies. Many Calvinist members of civic government were involved, which gave the Chambers the semi-official public role of deliberately crafting cultural politics. The main purpose was urban harmony. An important strategy was to de-emphasize divisive doctrines, zealotry, and controversies, especially those that incited acrimonious disagreements between Catholics and Calvinists. The Chambers accordingly included not just Calvinists, but numerous Catholics, Mennonites, Lutherans, and members of other marginal confessional groups. A leader of the post-Reformation Amsterdam Chamber was Hendrick Laurensz Spiegel, who opted to remain Catholic even after the city officially turned to Calvinism. This excluded him from participation in civic

government, since only members of the Reformed Church could hold public office. But the cultural sphere afforded other opportunities to participate in public life, and Spiegel could exert influence on public opinion in his role as a rhetorician. Joost van den Vondel, a Mennonite immigrant, is another interesting instance of a highly influential but unconventional cultural producer. Vondel converted from being a Mennonite to a Remonstrant (a member of a dissenting Calvinist faction), and then to a Roman Catholic. In spite of his varying non-conformist religious affiliations, Vondel was one of the Dutch Republic's foremost literary figures. The participation of high-profile dissenters such as Spiegel and Vondel may seem odd, but this was in keeping with the larger aim of the Chambers of Rhetoric, which was to heal the disruptive religious and political – and cultural – conflicts of the Reformation and Revolt.¹¹ The ideal was to foster civic accord through broadly shared practices of performance and creativity.

This does not mean that there was never any controversy, of course. The Dutch Academy, where the Mennonite Theunisz briefly served as professor, was founded by dissatisfied members who broke from one of the Amsterdam Chambers in 1617. The Academy was conceived as a cultural and academic centre for the general public: it was open to everyone, offering vernacular instruction in both the arts and sciences. There were repeated condemnations by Reformed Church leaders, who mainly complained that the teaching and theatrical performances did not adhere to doctrine. This was during an extremely volatile period in the religious life of the Dutch Republic, when theological disputes between opposing Calvinist political factions almost erupted into civil war. The Amsterdam magistrates could not afford to take risks, and in 1619 they decided to appease the ultra-orthodox Calvinists and keep the peace by restricting the Academy's activities. It was later reconfigured. The Amsterdam Schouwburg, the civic theatre, was established for theatre performances, whereas higher learning became the domain of the Illustrious School, precursor to the University of Amsterdam. Both institutions continued to promote the peaceable and ecumenical aims of the earlier Chambers of Rhetoric.

In spite of concerted efforts to encourage harmonious cohesion, there were intriguing contradictions in Dutch spiritual culture. Something that many visitors noted was the curious fact that, while the Jews were allowed to worship quite openly, non-Reformed Christians were not. Instead, they relied on private house churches or *huiskerken* for the

continuance of their traditions.¹² In densely populated urban neighbourhoods, most residents knew about these clandestine worship services, even if those who attended did so discreetly. Sir William Temple, British ambassador to the Netherlands and keen observer of its customs, noted: 'Every man enjoys the free exercise [of religion] in his own Chamber, or his own House, unquestioned and unespied.'¹³ Like the Chambers of Rhetoric, the house churches fostered civic peace. They maintained the outward appearance of an ordered and unified orthodoxy while avoiding the need to police the private beliefs of residents. *Huiskerken* accordingly occupied a paradoxical place in Dutch society. While the aim was to de-emphasize religious differences, these sites concurrently sharpened awareness of the existence of dissident groups and permitted the continuance of unorthodox practices. In spite of the need to remain invisible, non-conformist sects were given licence to persist in the illicit rituals of their faith by hiding in plain sight.

House churches also cultivated incompatible approaches to the material culture of religion, a primary source of conflict between Roman Catholics and Calvinists. The Reformed faith was based on the Bible, the Word of God; it expressly distrusted visual representations of God or the saints, seeing these as instigators of idol worship. When the Calvinists came to power, they accordingly stripped the Dutch churches of visual imagery and material objects that expressed Catholic doctrines, rituals, and sacraments. This cleansing could be violent, as was the case in 1566, when waves of iconoclasm – destructive attacks on church art – swept through many cities and towns. The so-called Golden Age was not very golden for Dutch Catholics, who continued to hope for a restoration of the desecrated churches and a return to past traditions when their religion had been dominant. The house churches helped to keep such hopes alive. In many cities, Roman Catholic *huiskerken* evolved into much larger places of communal worship, where multiple families, indeed an entire congregation or parish, could meet and share in the communal experience of their faith. On the outside, these were anonymous structures, undistinguished from the residences or warehouses alongside them. Inside, however, they could be large and lavishly appointed spaces, graced with all the rich adornment that the Calvinists had evicted from the churches: elaborate altarpieces and tabernacles, liturgical silver, richly embroidered vestments, sculptural works and paintings depicting scenes from biblical history or the lives of the saints. Much was specially commissioned, often – but not always –



Figure 12.3 Elias Scerpswert, *Bust of Saint Frederick*, 1362.

from Roman Catholic artists and craftsmen. These hidden sanctuaries also preserved treasures from the past, such as a fourteenth-century silver reliquary containing the skull of St Frederick, a ninth-century bishop of Utrecht (Figure 12.3). After the iconoclasm, revered relics like this one were safeguarded in Utrecht's house churches, where the continued veneration of local saints was particularly significant for a shuttered Catholicism, denied any overt or public recognition of its long formative history.¹⁴ The vivid collective memory of pre-Reformation spiritual culture thus combined with the continuation of banned worship practices in the closeted space of the *huiskerk*, generating a new, quasi-clandestine and quasi-licensed sense of community. Such efforts were aided by the Holland Mission, established by the

international Roman Catholic Church with the goal of reconverting the Dutch Calvinist territories. Its success implied nothing less than a revolutionary overthrow of the religious and social organization of the body politic. This goes a long way towards explaining why the Jews but not the Roman Catholics were allowed to worship openly – the large numbers of faithful Catholics posed a much greater political threat than did the Jews, who had never had an approved place in public life.

Print culture was another instrumental means to propagate and sustain the faith. Large numbers of single-sheet prints, engraved images, pamphlets, and Roman Catholic books were published abroad and in the Dutch Republic. One of the most widely circulated works was the emblem book, *Pia Desideria* (*Pious Wishes*), first published in Antwerp in 1624. Dutch reprints of this popular book initially were published secretly with title pages that used the names and addresses of printers from the Southern Netherlands; only later in the century was Roman Catholic material published openly in the Dutch cities.¹⁵ Unlike Reformed devotional literature, Catholic publications contained numerous religious illustrations, designed to enhance spiritual meditation. The images in *Pia Desideria* picture two children who represent Divine Love and the Human Soul. Appealing to the emotions, this affective imagery expresses the soul's longing for the love of God, which never fails. The theme is conveyed with immediacy, as in the example of Divine Love freeing the entrapped Anima from a large bird cage that represents the snares of worldly enemies, as the reference to Psalm 141 indicates. Such imagery surely offered comfort to beleaguered Dutch Catholics.

The re-assertion of Catholicism was not just confined to house churches and private devotions. Even though they had lost their public places of worship, Catholics continued to frequent the cleansed medieval church buildings to engage in a range of customs that were forbidden by the Reformed: ritual processions, prayers at the tombs of the dead, observance of the cult of saints, the interpretation of miracles, and the veneration of sacred places. A vital example is the Heilige Stede, or Holy Place, a gothic chapel that once stood at the heart of Amsterdam, where it marked the site of a renowned medieval miracle. While the building itself is gone, the sacred status of the location persists. If you pause along Amsterdam's busy Kalverstraat and look above the store façades across from the intersection of the street Heilige Weg, there is an

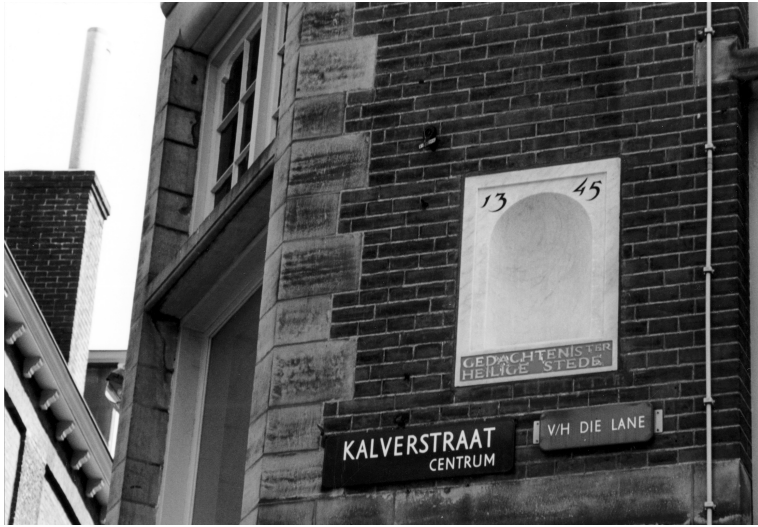


Figure 12.4 Anonymous, *Niche commemorating the Heilige Stede*, Amsterdam 238.

empty niche with the inscription: ‘1345[:] In memory of the Holy Place’ (Figure 12.4). The Heilige Weg or Holy Way was the old pilgrimage route to the Holy Place. Veneration of this sacred site never abated, in spite of the ban that the States of Holland placed on all pilgrimages in 1587, and in the face of repeated attempts by Reformed Church leaders to eradicate any revival of the memory of past miracles. Throughout the seventeenth century, pilgrims and worshippers continued to visit the chapel for prayer, secretly performing the building’s sacred status by executing triple circuits around its exterior. While clandestine, these rites were quite widely noted – they were even pointed out to tourists. A printed travel guide of 1689 states that ‘many devout pilgrimages are still performed daily around this chapel, especially by night and at odd hours’.¹⁶ In addition to these nocturnal rituals, there was an annual event, also covert yet conspicuous: a silent procession that departed from the Holy Place and traversed the city. This *Stille Omgang*, or Silent Circuit, is still performed every year in March. Conservative and intransigent, part of the power of spiritual culture is its resistance to enforced repression.

For the Dutch Republic’s sizeable Roman Catholic population, who had lost their churches, been denied their history, and been expelled

from political participation, sacred sites like the Holy Place were conduits not just to the divine, but also to an illustrious past when Roman Catholicism had been at the very centre of public life. The potency of sacred places, objects, images, and rituals fuelled expectations for a triumphant resurgence. The cultural policy of allowing the continuance of dissenting faiths therefore had the paradoxical effect of both keeping the peace and perpetuating practices that fragmented the body politic. As one visitor summed up, 'let this country call itself as long as it will the United Provinces . . . I am persuaded at this point there's no place so disunited.'¹⁷

Calvinist Culture?

A question that has long troubled the study of Dutch spiritual culture is whether it can be typified as distinctively Calvinist. According to the influential philosophy of Hegel, the answer was yes. In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel wrote that the Reformation was 'completely accepted' in Holland so that the spirit of Calvinism imbued all of Dutch culture.¹⁸ This became the dominant view, and only recently have we begun to interrogate the assumption that Dutch national culture was essentially Calvinist. As this chapter has aimed to demonstrate, the Dutch cities were a crossroads for people, ideas, and things from around the world, and there was a great deal of cultural mixing and exchange. This calls for a rethinking of familiar categorizations such as 'Dutch' or 'Calvinist' culture, bound to the regional views of a single ethnic or religious group. However, this does not mean that culture was not connected with religion. As we have seen, spiritual concerns were a vital part of public life: people were deeply committed to the practice, understanding, and discussion of their faith and expressed a great deal of curiosity about the differing beliefs of others.

If Dutch culture was neither fundamentally Calvinist nor completely secular, how then should we describe it? One approach has been to consider the negative effects of Reformed doctrine as a repressive force. We have already heard many such Calvinist voices, calling for the conversion of 'heathen' Jews and 'Turks', the persecution of heretics, the dismissal of dissenting Mennonites, the closure of theatres and academies, and the smashing of Roman Catholic idols. Yet, it was the Reformed civic magistrates who permitted the Jewish synagogue,

allowed non-conformist house churches, and were leading members of the ecumenical Chambers of Rhetoric. Indeed, professing Calvinists actively participated in every domain of cultural life – theatre, literature, painting, sculpture, publishing, cartography, architecture, and so forth. The Calvinists evidently did not have a unified approach but expressed a wide range of attitudes about what was acceptable cultural activity. There were, of course, different factions within Calvinism. What is more, the Reformed Church itself cannot be described as essentially Calvinist. This was due to another form of licensed tolerance: a distinction was made within the church between *lidmaten*, full members, and *liefhebbers*, sympathizers who attended services but did not take communion. The category of *liefhebber* allowed the non-Reformed to belong to the established church and consequently hold political offices and participate in public life. The observations of a disapproving Calvinist about these sympathizers are revealing: ‘It often appears that among the persons who call themselves *liefhebbers* lurk Catholics, Mennonites, Libertines, and atheists.’¹⁹ While Calvinist doctrine unambiguously condemned unorthodox beliefs, in actual practice, the Reformed Church was remarkably accommodating. It was in fact another place where a range of dissenters could hide in plain sight. This idiosyncratic mix of intolerance and openness on the part of the public church certainly contributed to the conflicting cultural dynamic of religious divisiveness and creative harmony that characterized spiritual life.

The domain of painting – an area of cultural production for which the Golden Age is particularly famed – provides an illustrative case of how repression and inventiveness could operate in tandem. Even though the Calvinists destroyed and prohibited church art, painting flourished as never before. There is much evidence that the suppression and regulation of religious art actually had the effect of stimulating rather than restricting artistic production. Prior to the Reformation, the majority of artistic commissions had been for Roman Catholic churches and devotional purposes. After the iconoclasm, however, painters had to adapt to an enormous drop in ecclesiastic patronage. They did so by experimenting with new forms of non-devotional art. While representations of God and saints were prohibited, Calvinists condoned depictions of the visible world as somewhat useful for didactic purposes. The Dutch specialities of landscape, seascape, still life, and genre scenes of everyday life accordingly proliferated.

As church art dwindled, artists began to produce an unparalleled number of paintings for a thriving open market. Commissioned works tend to convey a particular perspective that accords with the beliefs of the patron. De Witte's depiction of the synagogue for a Jewish buyer is a good example, as are the religious paintings that were specially made for the Roman Catholic house churches. Artists seeking anonymous buyers on the market, by contrast, needed to make a living; the new commercial situation was intensely competitive, and the works on sale had to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. These types of paintings could not merely express the artist's personal beliefs nor only target patrons from one religious group; they had to attract interest across confessions and also beyond national concerns or social and political affiliations.²⁰ The shift from church patronage to the open market was an important early moment in the mass production of art. Large numbers of paintings were sold to the diverse populaces of the rapidly expanding Dutch cities. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of images were shipped throughout and beyond Europe to its expanding colonial and trading empires in Central and South America and Asia especially. The same trade routes enabled large-scale importation, conveying various forms of visual imagery and material curiosities from around the world into the renowned *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammern* of the avid northern collectors, and increasingly into ordinary middle-class homes by the seventeenth century.²¹ Clearly, the work of art in this context was characterized by its ability to move across national, ethnic, and religious divides. As Ronald de Leeuw, former director of the Rijksmuseum, has emphasized, this global transit stimulated much cross-fertilization, giving the lie to the notion that there ever existed a 'typically Dutch' art.²² Needless to say, it was not typically Calvinist either.

Indeed, the religious significance of painted scenes of the everyday has proved notoriously difficult to decipher. Such works seldom impose a single definitive meaning; they present enigmas and offer contradictory explanations. One approach to this interpretive dilemma has been to tease out Calvinist content from mundane subject matter by referring to emblem literature. While Roman Catholic examples such as *Pia Desideria* included explicitly religious imagery, Calvinist emblems, such as the extremely popular works of Jacob Cats and Pieter Roemer Visscher, were illustrated with pictures of everyday objects accompanied by texts that infused them with moral significance. The method of relating the ambiguous motifs of paintings to emblems can generate

various plausible explanations. For example, the birdcage appears frequently in genre paintings of women in domestic interiors. It could signal the soul's imprisonment in a sinful world if viewed through the lens of *Pia Desideria*. More prosaic associations, such as voluntary imprisonment within the bond of matrimony, were brought forward by Cats and others. The cage also connoted chastity; but, if shown open with the bird flown, it might signify the loss of virginity. As Roemer Visscher stated in the introduction to his popular emblem book *Sinnepoppen* (*Images with Meaning*): 'everyone may use it as it suits him'.²³ Emblems – and genre imagery more broadly – were open to interpretation and thus could accommodate various moral and religious positions.

Still-life painting illustrates how this enigmatic play of meaning functioned in dialogue with the spiritual culture of the Golden Age. Jan van der Heyden's *Room Corner with Curiosities* (Figure 12.5) depicts a typical collection. In this compressed space are two globes, an atlas, a Bible, a Smyrna carpet, a Chinese silk cloth and porcelain bowl, a Japanese ceremonial sword, a history painting, the dangling carcass of an armadillo, and an inlaid wood and ivory cabinet with many drawers for smaller curiosities. Van der Heyden's beautifully crafted painting celebrates natural and human-made objects, the wonders of creation and creativity. It also acclaims the wealth of the collector and the Dutch Republic's prosperous trade in luxury imports.

Yet the painting simultaneously disparages this abundance of goods. The Bible in the foreground is open to the book of Ecclesiastes, highlighting a verse beloved by emblematisers: 'Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.' Many Dutch artworks contain moral warnings against putting too much value on the fleeting things of this world. Called *vanitas* imagery, such paintings actually deride painting itself as a futile, empty, and meaningless worldly endeavour. This condemnation of the image and all it portrays competes with appreciation of Van der Heyden's skilled craftsmanship and desire for the marvellous collectibles he depicts. In this manner, artists carved out a niche for their work by expressing and also circumventing Calvinist criticism of worldliness. This painting is a perfect paradox, which is to say that it presents two incompatible meanings simultaneously, so that one does not outweigh the other. Its curious mix of moral censure and creative inventiveness challenges viewers to think in terms of contradictions, even as they look for moral meanings in 'meaningless' paintings. Enigmatic works such



Figure 12.5 Jan van der Heyden, *Room Corner with Curiosities*, 1712.

as Van der Heyden's could thus address a broad range of potential clients, both within and beyond the unusually diverse Dutch cities. Devout Calvinists would be able to derive an appropriate biblical lesson or contemplate the wonders of God's creation. Other collectors with different sets of interests or beliefs might be more interested in the celebration of worldly accomplishments and commodities. *Vanitas* imagery accordingly could stimulate debate by offering differing viewpoints on contentious issues like the relationship between religion and material culture. The capacity of a single painting to provoke

incongruous interpretations makes sense when considered in connection to the broader context. These open-ended works were crafted to address and attract a very wide variety of potential art buyers within a rapidly expanding local and global market typified by spiritual and cultural heterogeneity.

To conclude, it appears that all sorts of paradoxes, contradictions, and inconsistencies flourished in the spiritual culture of the Dutch Republic, with its distinctive coexistence of multiple competing truths. The unusual accommodation of conflicting beliefs created a lively cultural milieu that allowed the participation of people with incompatible faiths. This stimulated the development of cultural forms – paintings, emblems, plays, poems – whose crafted ambiguity could appeal to an extremely diverse audience and prompt debate about differences of opinion. The tolerant allowance of various faith traditions and the cultivation of discussion about divergent convictions proved to be an effective means of keeping the peace: there was far less religious violence in the Dutch cities than in other parts of post-Reformation Europe.²⁴ However, this also produced conditions that allowed religious dissent. A common culture does not necessarily result in a uniform populace. Many of the people we have just encountered – Rabbi Uziel, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, Spiegel, Vondel, Theunisz – seemed to appreciate and benefit from the diversity of the shared cultural sphere while asserting and maintaining their particular religious identities within it. The de-emphasis of discord in favour of harmony and peace thus fostered a range of spiritual practices, even those that were banned, restricted, and repressed.

Notes

1. From a 1673 tract ‘On the Religion of the Hollanders’ by J.-B. Stoupe, the Swiss Reformed commander of Louis XIV’s troops, cited in R. Po-chia Hsia, ‘Introduction’, in R. Po-chia Hsia and H. van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, Cambridge, 2002, 1.
2. J. Howell, *Epistolae Ho-Eliaenae: Familiar Letters Domestic and Forren*, 2nd edn, 3 vols., London, 1650, vol. II, 11, 26.
3. A. Kuyper (ed.), *Voetius’ Catechisatie over den Heidelbergchem Catechismus: Naar Poudroyon’s Editie van 1662*, Rotterdam, 1891, 55–6.
4. Y. Kaplan, ‘For Whom Did Emanuel de Witte Paint His Three Pictures of the Sephardic Synagogue in Amsterdam?’, *Studia Rosenthaliana* 32 (1998), 133–54.
5. S. Nadler, *Rembrandt’s Jews*, Chicago, 2003.
6. E. V. Biema (ed.), ‘Een Reis door Holland in 1736’, *Oud Holland* 28 (1910), 88–90.

7. H. F. Wijnman, 'Jan Theunisz', *Jaarboek Amstelodamum* 25 (1928), 29–123.
8. D. van Dalen, 'Johannes Theunisz and 'Abd al-'Azīz: A Friendship in Arabic Studies in Amsterdam, 1609–1610', *Lias* 43 (2016), 161–89.
9. C. Brown, 'The Strange Case of Jan Torrentius: Art, Sex and Heresy in Seventeenth-Century Haarlem', in R. Fleischer (ed.), *Rembrandt, Rubens, and the Art of Their Time*, University Park, PA, 1997, 227.
10. Cited in S. Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, New York, 1987, 589.
11. M. A. Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt: Themes and Ideas*, Amsterdam, 1991, 11–14.
12. For example, Amsterdam's Ons' Lieve Heer op Zolder, discussed in Chapter 11.
13. W. Temple, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands*, 1673, ed. George Clark, Oxford, 1972, 104.
14. X. van Eck, *Clandestine Splendor: Paintings for the Catholic Church in the Dutch Republic*, Zwolle, 2008.
15. F. M. Dietz, 'Under the Cover of Augustine. Augustinian Spirituality and Catholic Emblems in the Dutch Republic', in K. Pollmann and M. J. Gill (eds.), *Augustine Beyond the Book: Intermediality, Transmediality, and Reception*, Leiden, 2012, 167–94.
16. J. ten Hoorn, *Reys-Boek door de Vereenigde Nederlande*, Amsterdam, 1689, 74–5.
17. Howell, *Epistolae Ho-Eliauae*, 19.
18. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols., Oxford, 1975, vol. II, 885.
19. Quoted in B. Kaplan, 'Confessionalism and Its Limits: Religion in Utrecht, 1600–1650', in Joneath Spicer et al. (eds.), *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht During the Golden Age*, New Haven, 1997, 69.
20. No art subject was the exclusive preserve of any confessional group. See J. Loughman and J. Michael Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses*, Zwolle, 2000, 48.
21. E. Bergvelt and R. Kistemaker (eds.), *De Wereld binnen handbereik. Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585–1735*, Zwolle, 1992.
22. R. de Leeuw, 'Art in Transit: Give and Take in Dutch Art', in Jaynie Anderson (ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, Melbourne, 2009, 11.
23. E. Stronks, *Negotiating Differences: Word, Image and Religion in the Dutch Republic*, Leiden, 2011, 71.
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Part VI

Art and Literature

The Markets for Art, Books, and Luxury Goods

When schoolmaster David Beck visited a Dutch art shop in 1624, he saw a variety of works of art, *exotica*, *naturalia*, and applied arts, including '[a]ntiquities, rarities, coins, shells, Vessels, Jewels, little paintings. The English traveller Philip Skippon similarly remarked on the variety of exotic objects such as Brazilian spiders' teeth, rattles of Indian snakes, and the rind of an Indian apple in a Rotterdam shop.¹ Beck and Skippon were not the only ones to comment; the widespread popularity of collectibles and other artistic or decorative items in seventeenth-century Dutch society was frequently mentioned in local and foreign letters and in diary entries. Even if their claims are sometimes exaggerated – common farmers did not 'put out two or 3,000 pounds in this commodity [paintings]', as English visitor John Evelyn stated in 1641 – other sources point to a marked increase in the number, quality, and assortment of artefacts that circulated in Dutch society during the seventeenth century.

Household inventories, sales catalogues, and private records, as well as many material and visual sources, show that during this period consumption habits of the European upper classes trickled down into Dutch society. Especially in the provinces of Holland and Zeeland – the more urbanized parts of the country – a growing group of merchants, shopkeepers, craftsmen, and manufacturers purchased luxury and semi-luxury goods, from relatively affordable artworks, prints, and books to carefully crafted local tableware and furniture, Flemish harpsichords, Persian carpets, and Chinese porcelain, to exotic birds, rare shells, tulip bulbs, and novel foodstuffs. Further down the social ladder and beyond the larger towns, household possessions were more modest, but here too changes in consumption practices meant more and more

people started spending on items that were not essential to their survival or profession. In a growing number of Dutch rural and urban households, for instance, the walls were covered with pictures and families used decorated earthenware.²

As Dutch consumption and production habits changed during the first decades of the seventeenth century, so did the way these items were bought and sold. The bulk of artistic and decorative production was now carried out on spec, instead of on commission, and customers visited shops, auctions, fairs, or professional art dealers to purchase books, art, and decorative ware. Art markets characterized by serialized production, public sales, and intermediaries had developed in the Southern Netherlands in the sixteenth century, and a local concentration of wealth and access to far-reaching trade networks there had launched an unprecedented commercialization of markets for paintings, tapestries, books, prints, musical instruments, and altarpieces, which in turn fuelled consumption and production of these goods. This process continued and intensified as towns in the northern provinces prospered during the seventeenth century, and before long mass markets for arts, books, and other luxury goods emerged.

Market Life Cycles

Markets expanded rapidly during the first half of the seventeenth century. Figure 13.1 gives estimates of the number of publishers and painters active in Dutch towns per year, two professional groups for which quantitative data are readily available.³ If we take these as proxies for overall development of markets for luxury and artistic goods, we see a trajectory of sudden take-off, high growth rates, stabilization, and slump or stagnation over the course of the seventeenth century. Readers familiar with Dutch economic history may recognize the shape, since the life cycles of the painting and publishing industries strongly resemble the trajectories of many other Dutch industries, trades, and crafts during this period. In fact, since the 1980s, the relationship between economic growth, market forces, and the production and consumption of art and culture in the Dutch Republic has become a prominent theme among historians of the Golden Age. This account of the life cycles of Dutch markets for art, books, and other luxury items summarizes their main findings and observations.

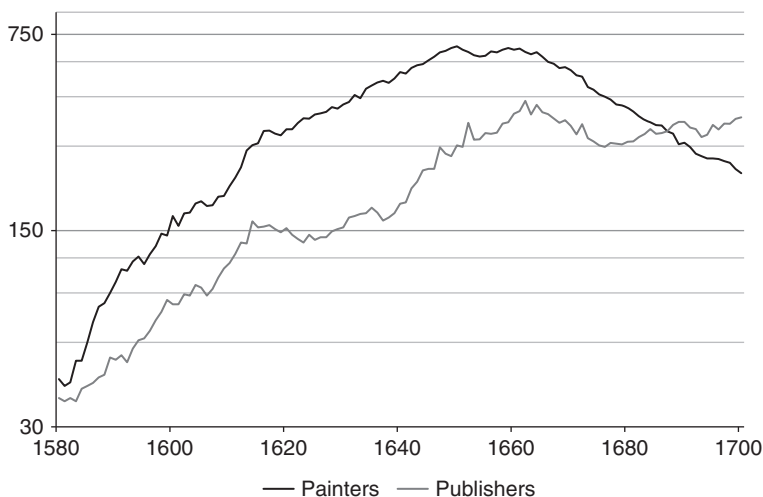


Figure 13.1 Estimates of the number of painters and publishers active in the Dutch Republic, 1580–1700 (five-year moving average, semi-logarithmic scale)

Until the 1560s and 1570s, markets for paintings and books in the northern provinces of the Low Countries had been relatively underdeveloped, at least in terms of numbers. Small pockets of talented artists and publishers could be found in Haarlem, Utrecht, and Deventer, for instance, but their size and scope were small compared to the cultural centres of the Southern Netherlands. This all changed with the onset of the Revolt and the fall of Antwerp, the undisputed cultural and commercial centre of the Low Countries, in 1585. In search of safety and economic opportunities, a wave of people from the Southern Netherlands temporarily or permanently moved north. The arrival of Southern Netherlandish skills and knowledge along with other economic, cultural, and social capital during the early decades of the Revolt boosted nascent Dutch markets for luxury goods.

In the densely populated, literate, and urbanized provinces of Holland and Zeeland, these immigrants met a solid and growing demand for luxury products such as paintings, books, and furniture, both from newcomers like them and from local town dwellers. By the 1600s, the scale and scope of Dutch markets for art and books had increased significantly, and rapid demographic growth, expansion of

trade and manufacturing, and increases in purchasing power furthered such development. This interaction of supply and demand during the turbulent final decades of the sixteenth century was helped by local policies that were relatively favourable to immigrant entrepreneurs, craftsmen, and other start-ups. The government of Leiden, for instance, went out of its way to attract Southern Netherlandish workers to revive the struggling textile industry and also actively sought out talented scholars, publishers, printers, and typesetters from the south. Demand for 'objects of desire', whether cheap or expensive, was initially met and fuelled by imports and immigrant artists and artisans, but soon local and regional producers took up the challenge.

But market expansion was not just a function of commerce and wealth or a matter of scale. In this time of political and religious turmoil, networks of painters, publishers, scientists, authors, artisans, and artists together shaped an ever more lively cultural climate in which novelties were introduced and took root. Publishers such as Cornelis Claesz in Amsterdam and Leiden-based Hans Matthysz, for instance, recognized that for people who could read and afford to buy books, (potential) wants and desires were not fully satisfied by the expensive works crafted for the international elite nor by the cheap titles issued in bulk for the masses. They exploited this gap in the market by, for instance, introducing deluxe Dutch versions of popular genres such as travelogues and songbooks. Although undoubtedly inspired by the strategies of their Southern Netherlandish predecessors, original configurations in terms of language, size, font, and illustrations did result in the introduction of stylish new products. Similar accomplishments challenged the position of Antwerp as the undisputed cultural centre in the Low Countries in the areas of print-making and painting as well as furniture production.

Still, the Republic was catching up rather than taking the lead in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Markets were relatively modest in terms of size and scope, and it would take a new generation of entrepreneurs and a string of innovations to unlock mass production for an increasingly open market. This process has been particularly well described regarding the market for paintings, but similar developments took place in, for instance, book and furniture production. From the 1610s onwards, artists in Dutch towns broke with traditions established by their Southern Netherlandish counterparts in more radical ways in terms of iconography, technique, and composition. They used fewer motifs and figures of people while adding more sky and shade in their

paintings, which reduced the amount of labour they needed to expend. Painters also applied fewer and more subdued colours, reduced the size of the pictures, and introduced a rapid production technique of applying thin layers of paint with swift brushstrokes. In other more traditional genres such as religion or mythology, artists simplified designs and colouring and painted on smaller canvases. To further increase efficiency, many specialized (sometimes temporarily) in a subject and style, thereby turning artistic motifs and themes into genuine genres. In little more than a decade, artists such as Esaias van de Velde and Jan Porcellis – and later Jan van Goyen and Salomon van Ruysdael as well – infused existing genres such as still lifes, landscapes, marines, merry companies, and peasant scenes with a look that was so distinctive and novel that it became the hallmark of early modern Dutch painting (see Figure 13.3).

Economist Michael Montias described (in 1990) the artistic inventions of the 1610s and 1620s as being product and process innovations.⁴ In response to increasing competitive pressure and rising potential demand for affordable pictures, painters had to increase productivity and distinguish themselves from competitors. In doing so, they set in motion the large-scale production of cheaper paintings that could penetrate broader markets. As a result of such strategies of specialization, innovation, and differentiation, markets for arts and culture expanded rapidly. The varied range of affordable products now on offer resulted in crowded and complex local markets around the middle of the seventeenth century. At the same time, changing macro-economic circumstances restricted further population growth and increases in purchasing power. The series of wars the Dutch engaged in during the second half of the seventeenth century was not conducive to widespread spending on arts and culture either. All this contributed to a dramatic drop in the number of painters and stagnation in the number of publishers from the 1670s onwards, but individual markets also had their own issues (see Figure 13.1).

In the case of painting, for instance, everyday issues limited purchases of new works. Paintings were durable items, and space on people's walls was limited. New fashions for other visual art forms such as decorated wallpaper now attracted buyers and further limited demand for new paintings. In the case of publishing, solid local and growing international demand for entertainment, knowledge, and information sustained the high levels of production reached by mid century. Although books, like paintings, were durable goods, they took up less

space and fulfilled more functional purposes in people's lives. Dutch publishers were already well positioned in the international book trade, and they managed to consolidate and expand their presence in foreign markets until well into the eighteenth century.⁵

This pattern of rapid expansion, stagnation, and eventual decline in markets for cultural goods such as books and paintings was not the same across the board. In the case of Delftware (the famous blue-and-white pottery still sold in shops in the Netherlands), the middle of the seventeenth century marked a period of sustained growth. Civil unrest in China around that time caused a shortage of porcelain imports, and Dutch faience producers saw the opportunity. Delft firms in particular started churning out pottery with Chinese-style decorations on a large scale, and by 1670 there were more than twenty-five businesses in the town employing about 500 artisans and faience painters. Several other luxury industries also thrived in this period. The number of silver-smiths and goldsmiths registered in Amsterdam, for instance, more than doubled between the second and fourth quarters of the seventeenth century.⁶ The concentration of wealthy inhabitants in Amsterdam who sought to embellish their homes appears to have driven this development.

By the end of the Golden Age, Dutch merchants, especially in Amsterdam, had strengthened their position in the international and transit trade in art and luxury goods. They could thus compensate for the levelling off of domestic demand for luxury goods by entering expanding foreign markets. As domestic second-hand markets expanded, Dutch paintings became a valuable export product. The smaller, plentiful, and relatively affordable Dutch paintings became popular; especially the *fijnschilder* paintings went particularly well with the collectors' cabinets that were in vogue across Europe at the time. Publishers – already well established in the international book trade – imported and exported books on a large scale, and the market for French titles grew to be of particular importance. In a lucky confluence of fashion, international demand for decorative tableware like Delftware was reinforced by a growing mania for tea, coffee, and chocolate from the colonies. And in the circular trade between the Americas, Asia, and different parts of Europe, stimulants such as spices, sugar, tea and coffee, and woven silks and cottons from, for instance, India were shipped from the East, and in exchange, international art dealers based

in Antwerp, such as Forchondt and Musson, used Dutch ports to ship decorative and artistic items to the Americas.⁷

This account of the development of markets for art, books, and luxury goods reflects three broad scholarly trends that have gained traction over the past few decades.⁸ Firstly, by the 1970s, scholars had begun to study artworks and other cultural artefacts within their historical contexts, be they political, cultural, social, intellectual, or economic. Secondly, within this contextual approach, the economic perspective has acquired a prominent position, especially in a field where some may least expect it: art history. Economists and economic historians started to analyse works of art as commodities, buyers as rational consumers, and producers as entrepreneurs, and this practice has now become commonplace in Dutch art history. Thirdly, in doing this, scholars experimented with the use of statistics, computers, and formal economic models. They have sought to measure Dutch art markets quantitatively by means of, for instance, estimates of the size of artist population, productivity, price development, and the total number of artworks produced.

Propelled by American economist and Vermeer specialist Michael Montias, these developments took hold firmly in the Netherlands and particularly in the study of Golden Age painting. Although most studies of the production of other luxury products during the Dutch Golden Age acknowledge general economic circumstances and discuss many commercial aspects, they tend to do so without the explicit use of economic theory or methods. In the field of book history, for instance, there is a lot of focus on the strategies of individual publishers and on the strong position of the Dutch book trade until the middle of the eighteenth century; only recently do we see systematic and quantitative analyses of market size and structure, prices, and commercial strategies. In the following sections we will look deeper into the economics but also pay attention to socio-cultural conditions that help to explain the expansion of Dutch markets for art, books, and luxury goods.

Culture and Commerce

In the relatively open markets for art, relationships with patrons were still very important to the careers of many artists and artisans and to market functioning in general. Civic and merchant patronage was

a distinguishing feature of Dutch markets for art and culture, especially in the highly urbanized parts of the United Provinces. The Catholic churches had been leading patrons of the arts, but that ended with the Reformation since Calvinists officially opposed the use of images in their churches. The emergence of a republican form of government similarly meant the Habsburg monarchy and its court were no longer major patrons of the arts. To some extent the stadholders of the Orange and Nassau dynasties, most notably Frederick Henry and Amalia van Solms, took on that role and regularly purchased works by local and international artists and craftsmen in their attempts to give their court royal standing.

Government institutions such as the States General, the East (VOC) and West (WIC) India Companies, and the various provincial governments were occasional rather than structural patrons. Urban authorities played a more important role in artistic and artisanal life, as they regularly commissioned buildings (including churches), portraits, furniture, tableware, books, and other kinds of decorative and artistic artefacts. The famous silversmith Johannes Lutma the elder, for instance, received more than 44,000 guilders in commissions from the city of Amsterdam between 1634 and 1661. Group portraits of regents (*regentenstukken*) and militias (*schutterstukken*) such as Rembrandt's iconic work known as *The Night Watch* are among the most obvious examples of civic patronage. These grand, complex scenes commemorated the participation of burghers in urban institutions and were commissioned to adorn the walls of public buildings. Portraits of civic militias in particular were real public showpieces of urban and burgher self-representation, and they formed a significant source of income and prestige for artists.

There were many motivations for commissioning works of art: they could serve to celebrate local histories and future ambitions, to position towns within regional and European urban hierarchies and rivalries, and to legitimize political authority after the Dutch Revolt. The media also varied, from material objects such as paintings, furniture, and stained glass windows to non-material ones such as poems, plays, and processions. The construction and decoration of the Amsterdam Town Hall just after the middle of the century combined all these media and motivations, forming what is arguably the most ostentatious example of urban patronage in the Dutch Republic.

Civic patrons could order directly from local and international artists and craftsmen, but patronage could also take a more indirect form. Artworks were offered unsolicited to regents in order to boost the producer's reputation or to generate financial support. Dedications in books and prints reveal intricate networks of patronage, existing or desired. The country's most famous poet, Joost van den Vondel, dedicated his Virgil translations to a number of potential patrons: the city of Amsterdam, its burghers, and city officials, but also to Constantijn Huygens, the secretary to the stadholder. In a remarkably explicit request for financial support to Amsterdam burgomaster Cornelis de Graeff, the poet referred to himself as Virgil and to De Graeff as Augustus.⁹

City dwellers, often well-to-do merchants and manufacturers, populated these civic institutions. Relationships between merchants and the arts, or more generally between commerce and culture, were intimate and varied. As in earlier times and in other regions, affluent Dutch burghers had their portraits painted, commissioned specific images, and ordered custom-made cabinets, inlaid mirrors, or decorated clavichords for their homes. Good relations with the wealthy and powerful were, moreover, crucial for individual artists. Analyses of business strategies used by, for instance, painters Govert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol suggest that reciprocity, friendship, and artists' self-positioning were determining factors in career prospects, earnings, and reputation.¹⁰ Even if these famous artists operated at the upper ends of the art market, support and friendship were key to many an artist's career, and the reverse – befriending artists – increased the cultural capital of merchants.

Collectively, these men and women were also crucial to market development in a more indirect way. Merchants were usually involved in cultural affairs across Europe, but in the Dutch Republic they dominated urban life. In networks that became more restricted and privileged as the century progressed, merchant-magistrates were in charge of trade and politics, but also of justice, social affairs, and cultural life. They feature as collectors, patrons, art lovers, connoisseurs, dealers, taste-makers, agents, and brokers, often combining two or more of these roles. Amsterdam merchant-collectors in particular formed tightly knit and influential commercial and cultural networks, as poet Thomas Asselijn stressed in 1653 when he wrote, 'Here is the stock exchange, the money, and the love

of art', referring to a festive occasion at the Guild of St Luke where painters, poets, and art lovers assembled.¹¹ Even if the ideal of *mercator sapiens* – the learned merchant – was an intellectual construct, the realms of commerce, learning, and the arts were strongly intertwined in the Dutch Republic.¹² As a result, merchant culture could shape the cultural conventions and hierarchies that governed exchange and valuation practices in early modern Dutch markets for arts and culture, as is visible in, for instance, the widespread practice of collecting art and rare, often foreign, objects and naturalia.

Populuxe

The high end of the art and luxury markets, characterized by civic and merchant cultural conventions, was firmly supported by large-scale production and consumption in the middle and lower market segments. Not far behind radical innovators such as Jan van Goyen and Rembrandt followed thousands of artists and craftsmen who by means of imitation and emulation churned out many slightly different variations in every conceivable genre, style, and price range. In earthenware production, for instance, Delft entrepreneurs explored a wide range of different products, simultaneously feeding off and shaping demand for the new and the exotic, as they started producing cheap majolica with coarse designs as well as a more elegant new product known as Delftware or Dutch porcelain.

As the novel or exotic inevitably became common, new variants were continually introduced, further expanding the range of goods on offer. 'Always something new' reads the news-sheet held by the bookseller in Figure 13.2. This printer's mark can be found on publications of Amsterdam bookseller Johannes van den Bergh in the early 1660s and testifies to the importance of novelty in the marketing of books. The intense product differentiation in seventeenth-century markets for art and culture was part and parcel of the emergence of a populuxe market culture. Since Cissie Fairchilds introduced this term into historical research by analysing the popularity of cheap copies of items used by the aristocracy – such as umbrellas, fans, and snuffboxes in eighteenth-century France – it is often used to describe knock-offs and emulations of lifestyles of the rich and famous.¹³ Here, I use it to denote not only production of more affordable and less durable non-essentials on a larger scale for a wider audience, but also, and perhaps especially, the



Figure 13.2 Device of the Amsterdam printer Iohannes van den Berg in Laurens van Zanten, *Spiegel der gedenckweerdighste wonderen en geschiedenissen onses tijds*, 1661.

introduction of and demand for new products and product variants across a wide range of goods.

Far-reaching product differentiation in markets for art and books was the result of two trends. Firstly, consumer goods such as books, furniture, clothing, tableware, mirrors, and curtains became less desirable for their intrinsic qualities – value of the raw materials, functionality, durability – and more for intangible qualities such as novelty, fashion, and design. Majolica, porcelain, and other decorative earthenware items that were more delicate and fragile than solid tin or copper tableware, for instance, became popular all across Dutch society. Secondly, the art pieces that previously had been exchanged mainly in one-offs on commission, such as easel paintings, were being standardized, produced in bulk, sometimes even through large workshop contracts, and sold in shops on spec. Even the market for Dutch history paintings – traditionally considered a superior and more expensive genre – became populated with artworks in all price and quality categories. From commissioned masterpieces that were sold for hundreds of guilders by Rembrandt and his famous contemporaries, to works by lesser-known masters such as David Colijns valued at a few dozen



Figure 13.3 Esaias van de Velde, *A View in the Dunes*, 1629.

guilders, to anonymous workshop painters who produced (sometimes original) paintings worth just a few guilders, to cheap prints of only a few *stuivers* – everything was available.¹⁴

The fast-growing and highly differentiated markets during the Golden Age depended on an infrastructure that helped producers and consumers to distinguish, compare, and communicate, especially as the value of paintings, books, and ceramics became based more on intangible qualities such as fashion, design, curiosity, and novelty. Historians have observed, for instance, that art dealers became more important as markets became more crowded and complex, and that they added to the hype of ‘paintings as wall decoration’ through branding and marketing activities. The development of the Republic, and especially Leiden, as the cradle of specialized book auctions early in the century – and later on, art auctions in Amsterdam – moreover, was largely due to the development of auctions and catalogues as channels of distribution and marketing.¹⁵

To some extent, similar changes in patterns of consumption, distribution, and production were occurring right across Europe. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the number, quality, and variety

of material goods owned by households from different economic and social backgrounds expanded significantly across Europe and beyond.¹⁶ The disintegration of boundaries between what was considered art, luxuries, or commodities was, moreover, not entirely new; historians contend it took off in sixteenth-century Antwerp and even earlier in Florence and Bruges.¹⁷ These significant and widespread changes in consumption habits and retailing practices are now seen through the frame of a consumer revolution. In Jan de Vries's theory about changes in working and spending patterns of early modern households (known as the Industrious Revolution), the Dutch Republic features as the epicentre of consumer desire for luxuries, semi-luxuries, and decorative items.¹⁸ Although some of the empirical foundations for the Industrious Revolution have been contested and the notion of a consumer revolution has been deflated, there is little doubt that consumption habits changed significantly throughout Europe during the early modern period. Even if the process was neither linear nor uniform, it definitely gained momentum in the Republic after the 1600s.

Cultural Industries

The notion of populuxe goods draws our attention to the properties they share; what these goods have in common is that they are exchanged in a market context and that they are imbued with strong aesthetic and symbolic content. Researchers in the social sciences have observed that present-day industries in which such 'cultural products' take shape – so-called cultural industries – tend to be concentrated in urban areas, are supported by local socio-professional institutions, and appear well positioned in international cultural and commercial networks. In the Dutch Republic this was no different. The development of seventeenth-century Dutch markets for arts and other luxury goods into populuxe markets was also made possible by organizational arrangements that balanced local institutional support with a polycentric industrial structure and international merchant connections.

Cultural production was concentrated in the area now referred to as the Randstad, a polycentric urban region in the mid-western part of the country. Here, producers could more easily tap into transport and credit facilities and were close to potential consumers, colleagues, and

suppliers. Amsterdam played a central role in most markets, especially from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, but the geography of cultural production was polycentric. In this small country, distances between towns were short to begin with and, as transportation options improved during the course of the seventeenth century, a well-developed distribution and communication infrastructure came into being. This facilitated the exchange of information and goods between towns and sped up the spread of innovations and the development of local specializations.

Local clustering had many advantages, and patterns of growth and specialization reinforced those advantages. Located close to one another in dense socio-professional networks, local buyers, suppliers, and colleagues could easily exchange information and knowledge while keeping an eye on competitors and counterparts in related industries. As a result, certain cultural hubs emerged within the polycentric integrated markets for arts and culture. The uneven distribution of book production across the country was, for example, determined by the size of local demand and by distinct urban features: the university in Leiden, the presence of the Orange court and the States General in The Hague, and the thriving commerce and cultural life of Amsterdam. In the business of painting, Amsterdam, Haarlem, and Utrecht, and later also Delft, Leiden, and The Hague, took centre stage. Here too, local demand made these towns particularly attractive, but their previous reputations and the presence of acclaimed artists provided an additional impetus for industrial development. While most industries could be found in several areas and towns, others saw a more intensive geographic concentration; the town of Delft became, for instance, so dominant in the field of decorative ceramics that the product would derive its name from the location.

To a certain degree, these features were formalized in local institutions such as guilds, which organized training and protected the business interests of their members. In most Dutch towns, painters, booksellers, and decorative artists and craftsmen were members of guilds that encompassed a range of related economic activities, such as the more artistically oriented Guild of St Luke. In fact, relationships between different activities such as book production, graphic art, science, theatre, and painting were a prominent feature of Dutch cultural production. In 1579 in Amsterdam, for instance, the Guild of St Luke split off from other trades to deal exclusively with the visual arts;

the members included painters, tapestry makers, embroiderers, and engravers. As markets for art and decoration expanded in scale and complexity, so did the number of towns where the artists' guilds issued new and stricter charters and where an independent Guild of St Luke or booksellers' guild was established.

By the end of the century, then, most markets for books, art, and luxury goods were regulated by guilds. But they were still relatively porous; in most trades and industries, people, products, and ideas could travel between towns fairly easily. Dutch towns and merchants were strong in international trade, and their relative openness, as well as the influx and outflow of information, knowledge, and skills, became defining features of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. The influx of expertise and know-how from the Southern Netherlands early in the century had proven invaluable to dormant or relatively underdeveloped cultural industries such as printing and to barely existing market niches such as landscape painting and, even though the share of immigrant cultural entrepreneurs shrank as time passed, the participation of non-locals was a constant in most trades and industries. Industries such as glass-making and engraving, for instance, were much indebted to Venetian and German migrant craftsmen setting up shop or working in Middelburg, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and other towns. The migration of Huguenot entrepreneurs and artisans at the end of the seventeenth century provided another potential influx of foreign skills and knowledge to cultural markets, although recent research has argued that their economic impact has been exaggerated.¹⁹

Information, news, and knowledge also travelled in and out of the Republic through what has been described as an early modern system of brokerage.²⁰ Diplomats, scholars, artists, priests, booksellers, bankers, and merchants actively facilitated the transmission and dissemination of knowledge, ideas, and objects. These cultural brokers dealt not only in cultural artefacts but also in political information, and they often operated across the upper ends of markets for art, books, and various luxury goods. The financing and logistics of export goods such as Bibles on a larger scale also required cultural entrepreneurs to be well connected in merchant circles. International trade in books and other populuxe goods was a complex business, and publishers faced serious liquidity risks in the light of high up-front investments, slow sales, and unpredictable demand. Dutch printers and publishers in particular were well connected, with paper merchants facilitating trade by

advancing credit and sharing information about foreign markets. The distribution of English Bibles, Latin Catholic works, Hebrew religious works, and later also works by controversial French authors show that these products, whether produced in or merely shipped through the Republic, followed common trade routes.

Conclusion

In 1624, the Protestant minister Dirck Raphaelsz Camphuysen lamented the ubiquity of pictures in the Dutch Republic. ‘The whole world depends on engraving, drawing, painting,’ he exclaimed. ‘Painting! Ha, who can denounce it without [inciting] general rebellion?’ When other contemporaries, foreign and local, remarked on the popularity of paintings in the Dutch Republic, they were generally not so disapproving. Constantijn Huygens, for one, sang quite a different tune when he commended the large number and high quality of Netherlandish landscape and history painters active in his time. Camphuysen and Huygens may have had incentives, albeit quite diverging ones, to overstate the omnipresence of pictures, yet quantitative analyses corroborate their impressions. Around the middle of the seventeenth century, hundreds of often highly productive painters were active in many different market niches, and estimates of their total output over the course of the century run into the millions.²¹

In fact, during the lifetimes of Huygens and Camphuysen, Dutch markets for art and many other luxury goods expanded, widened, and deepened so dramatically that historians might never tire of seeking novel ways to map, analyse, and interpret this phenomenon. The cultural boom that earned the Golden Age its fame should be understood partly as a byproduct of general favourable circumstances. With economic prosperity, population growth, relative freedom of press and thought, high levels of literacy, and developed trade networks, an upsurge in both demand for and supply of paintings, books, and other luxury objects is hardly surprising. Product and process innovations, flourishing populuxe consumer culture, sophisticated merchant and civic patronage, and well-organized and internationally oriented cultural industries pushed the volume, scope, and quality of production and consumption of such items to even greater heights. Collectively these features contributed in major

ways to the development of booming mass markets for art, books, and several other luxury goods that are so characteristic of the Dutch Golden Age.

From here, future researchers working on markets for art, books, and luxury goods can go different ways. One approach would be to undertake economic investigations of the many Dutch markets for art and luxury goods for which data have been collected but which have not been subjected to systematic economic investigations. Two markets in particular spring to mind – furniture and silverware – but there are others. With the massive digitization of historical information and resources, and the techniques that are being developed in the field of digital humanities, it has become easier to trace long-term development, and to study connections between different markets and market segments through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The acknowledgement of macro-level conditions and market forces has greatly improved our understanding of the form and function of Golden Age art and culture, but at the expense of more social and cultural interpretations of how markets work.

Therefore, a second potential approach – fascinating and crucial – would be to systematically include cultural and social factors in analyses of markets for art, books, and other luxury goods. Concepts such as taste, ideas, and mentality are central to such an interpretation but have largely been left out of economic analyses because they are difficult to define and measure. But now museums and heritage institutions can provide information on the aesthetic and stylistic features of historical cultural artefacts, making it possible to study the socio-economic context and cultural content in conjunction and ask questions about the development of style, quality, and value in a market setting. Recent sociological literature, especially on markets, can aid historians in formulating and interpreting questions related to these issues. What, for instance, is the role of intermediaries, quality standards, and other institutions in the co-ordination of supply and demand, and how does this change over time, or vary across space?²² Answering these questions may help us to better understand why the sheer scale and scope of artistic production and consumption are just as characteristic of the Dutch Golden Age as the masterpieces by painters like Rembrandt and publishers like Joan Blaeu.

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Genre Painting

Dutch seventeenth-century genre paintings, commonly known as scenes of everyday life, encompass a startling variety of subject matter. They range from portrayals of virtuous women working in the home to their moral antipodes, prostitutes, seductively plying their trade among prospective clients; from peasants in ramshackle hovels to the reveries of elegantly attired young people in palatial settings; from attentive children in schoolrooms to their mischievous cousins who wreak havoc during festive occasions. The ability of these seemingly unassuming yet celebrated images to evoke daily existence during the so-called Golden Age in the Netherlands is legendary. The tremendous success in our own era of international exhibitions of the work of such noted genre painters as Johannes Vermeer and Gerrit Dou readily confirms this. The reasons for the unremitting popularity of genre paintings undoubtedly reside in what we today perceive as their typically 'Dutch' characteristics. In comparison to the often grandiloquent pictures produced in other European countries during this epoch, they seem so straightforward and unassuming. In all fairness, Dutch seventeenth-century painters were fully capable of portraying grandiose, even bombastic, pictures illustrating biblical and mythological themes. Indeed, artists like the famed Rembrandt produced just such works throughout his distinguished career. Yet, when we think of Dutch painting, what inevitably comes to mind are scenes of daily life, illustrated with tremendous charm and conviction, seemingly conjuring up for our delight the halcyon existence of a long-vanished culture. Of course, genre paintings were produced in other European countries during the seventeenth century as well, but not on the prodigious scale that one finds in the Dutch Republic. Add to this the significant role

they played in shaping the image of the Dutch Golden Age, and it is clear the genre is of central importance to our understanding of the period.

The ability of these modest-looking pictures to evoke everyday life in bygone times has long been celebrated. But beyond their strikingly naturalistic appearance, genre paintings simultaneously weave clever fictions, because they synthesize observed fact with a well-established repertoire of motifs and styles to create what are, in essence, fabricated images. In other words, the most distinguishing feature of genre paintings, namely, their ostensible capacity to offer us an unmediated glimpse of the past is, paradoxically, the most deceptive. Much of our confusion is excusable, however, owing to their stunning lifelikeness. Seventeenth-century viewers also responded with wonder to the natural look of these works. Contemporary writers routinely marvelled at the apparent fidelity with which painters captured the surrounding world. Moreover, they compared the prototypical painting to a 'mirror' of nature: like a mirror, a painting delightfully yet deceptively renders an illusion, that is, a mere semblance of things, as opposed to those actual things themselves.¹

Despite the impressive naturalism of Dutch genre paintings, it is astounding (and baffling) to learn that the connections between what they portray and what really existed in contemporary life are often tenuous. For example, countless pictures present costume details that are completely incongruous with clothing actually worn in the Dutch Republic. This is especially true of the work of the Utrecht Caravaggisti, a group of painters active in the city of Utrecht who were more or less followers of the eminent early seventeenth-century Italian master, Caravaggio. Numerous figures in their paintings don outlandish garments mostly reminiscent of fashions in centuries preceding the seventeenth (see Figure 14.1). In a similar spirit, genre paintings frequently feature architectural settings that might strike us as being entirely plausible but, to the contrary, contain fantastic elements such as ornate marble mantelpieces and large brass chandeliers, the latter manufactured in the Netherlands principally for large public buildings (Figure 14.2).² Such luxuries rarely, if ever, embellished real homes of the day. These examples and others discussed in this chapter underscore the dubious links between what was portrayed in Dutch art and the true state of daily life in the Dutch Republic.

Further complicating our understanding of this art is the surprisingly restricted range of what it depicts. If by definition genre paintings



Figure 14.1 Gerrit van Honthorst, *Allegory of Lust*, 1628.

represent quotidian events, then the potential subjects for Dutch seventeenth-century artists to portray must have been inexhaustible. However, this is not at all the case. For instance, the nation's status as one of Europe's pre-eminent maritime powers might presuppose the existence of numerous representations of dock workers and other scenes related to its flourishing commerce. Yet virtually none exist. Although Dutch genre paintings do offer a wide variety of subject matter, the scope of what was actually portrayed compared to what could



Figure 14.2 Gerard ter Borch, *Curiosity*, c. 1660.

conceivably be portrayed is quite limited. The relatively restricted parameters of suitable subjects for artistic representation in seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting attest to its conventionality.³ The term 'conventionality' refers not simply to the repetition of specific styles and motifs but especially to the restricted number of themes that artists depicted, ones which were continually repeated, often over several generations. Therefore, some themes were painted with ever increasing

frequency while others just never took root within the limited artistic repertoire.

Two factors help to explain this phenomenon: firstly, contemporary audiences took strong comfort in what was already familiar. Consequently, it was entirely reasonable that genre painters would turn to the art of the recent past for inspiration. The second factor is a logical extension of the first: artists responded enthusiastically to older art, considering it relevant for the creation of new art because the early modern period as a whole imputed great value to artistic conservatism. The aesthetic standards of that day, which demanded that artists work within established modes, were hence the polar opposite of those of our own post-modern era, which places such a lofty premium upon creativity and originality.

Genre painters thus fashioned pictures in response to personal aesthetic interests, to pictorial traditions, and especially to the demands of the market. The long-ingrained view among scholars that seventeenth-century artists somehow worked independently of the art market has undergone substantial revision in recent decades.⁴ As Chapter 13 of this volume shows, the market actually functioned as a dynamic system of supply and demand affected by painters and patrons alike.

Since artists worked for the market, namely, for specific customers or for an unknown though limited audience on spec, they were compelled to produce works of art that accommodated the tastes and expectations of the consumer. In this sense, demand influenced the content of works, inducing some genre painters to specialize in particular subjects known to sell well or to jettison those that did not. Some of the very best genre painters also experimented with relatively novel subject matter (Figure 14.3), thereby shifting thematic conventions in the process. Demand also influenced style as artists periodically modified conventions by introducing stylistic innovations to make their works more attractive or even to lower the overall cost of producing them.

Who specifically were the prospective buyers of Dutch seventeenth-century genre paintings? For the types of pictures discussed in this chapter (moderately expensive to costly ones of uncompromisingly high quality), some patrons were members of the middle class, but most stemmed from the upper middle class and especially the social and cultural elite: the aristocracy, patricians, and wealthy merchants. Their demand for art remained more or less constant throughout the century (though the same cannot be said of the art market that serviced them). The complex interplay of such factors as supply and demand,

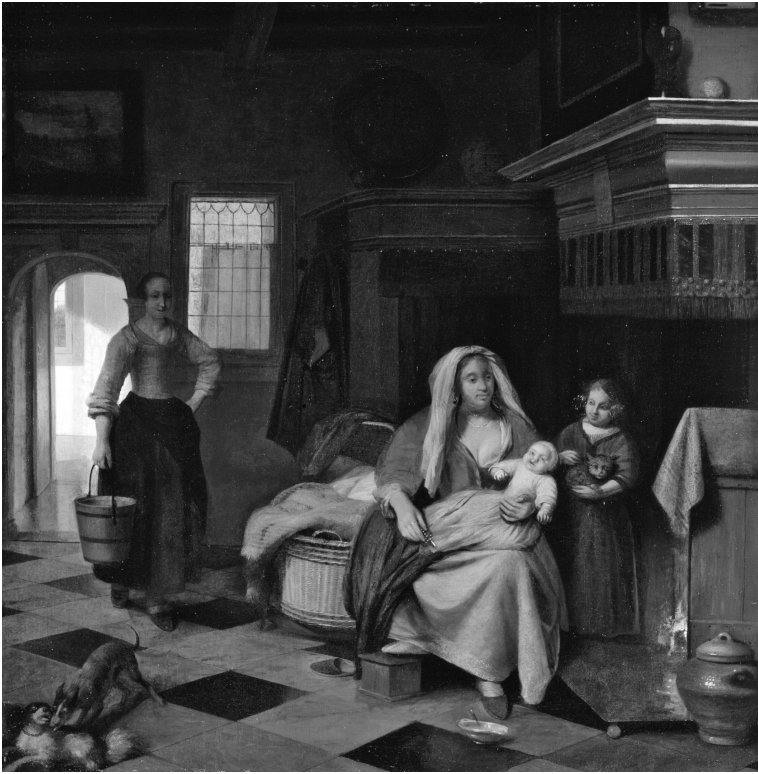


Figure 14.3 Pieter de Hooch, *A Mother with Her Children and a Servant*, c. 1675.

cycles of economic boom and bust, significant political developments, the ever-changing appearance of art in terms of styles and themes - that is, the ceaseless shifting of conventions - and the evolving tastes and sensibilities of audiences all contributed to a situation that was very fluid yet exhibited great vitality. Recognition of these factors compels us to take a diachronic approach to the material, that is, to assess genre painting in terms of how it developed over time, in order to gauge not only the contributions of individual artists but also how their work was perceived by contemporary audiences across the decades.



Figure 14.4 David Vinckboons, *Country Fair*, c. 1629.

The Subject Matter of Early Genre Painting

Certain subjects prevailed in Dutch genre painting during the first half of the seventeenth century. Among the most popular were images of prostitution.⁵ Depictions from this early period of this still understudied subject in genre painting often display, to modern viewers, a surprising if not shocking level of vulgarity. In this respect, it is not uncommon to encounter prostitutes, often bare-chested, who interact with or are even fondled by their licentious clients (see Figure 14.1). Depictions of this sort were sometimes identified as ‘*bordeeltjes*’ (little brothels) in contemporary inventories. Despite this factual-sounding descriptor, our increasingly detailed knowledge of prostitution in the Dutch Republic confirms the error of assuming that paintings of this subject illustrate its actual practice at that time, as if they somehow document the seamy side of seventeenth-century life.⁶ If anything, pictures such as the one illustrated in Figure 14.1 sanitize and embellish whoredom, transforming what was in reality an odious and dangerous livelihood into something tantalizing by illustrating the delightfully seductive flouting of accepted mores.

Another highly favoured subject was that of peasants. David Vinckboons, a painter who had emigrated in his youth from war-torn Flanders (modern-day Belgium) to the Netherlands, made it something

of a speciality. His *Country Fair* of c. 1629 offers a prototypical example of his treatment of this subject matter (Figure 14.4). This picture portrays peasant merrymaking or, more accurately, excessive revelry wherein ill-bred bumpkins dance, drink, and even vomit with wild abandon. Throngs of small-scale figures scurry to and fro through a dense, sylvan setting. The sheer wealth of detail can be easily scrutinized thanks to the tilted composition, which causes the space to recede upward rather than backward, a device common in early seventeenth-century Dutch art, known as 'bird's-eye perspective'.

Peasant fairs, called *kermissen* in Dutch, did actually take place in the Dutch Republic at this time. Nevertheless, Vinckboons' painting does not simply chronicle a particular seventeenth-century gathering of rural folk, so it is far from providing us with the painted equivalent of a modern-day Instagram photo. The panel owes less to the recording of real life than to pictorial traditions that had been established some fifty years earlier by the greatest Flemish painter of the sixteenth century, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, to whose art, Vinckboons, as a native of Flanders, was particularly responsive. In fact, Vinckboons's *Country Fair*, painted late in his career, is just one of approximately a dozen representations he produced of these *kermissen*, all constituting variations upon one another. Vinckboon's repetition of this subject throughout his career, as well as the constant duplication of motifs within individual pictures, attests to their incessant conventionality as well as their limited ties to actual social conditions.

Traditionally, scholars considered the function of such paintings didactic, that is, to admonish cosmopolitan viewers about vice in a gentle and inoffensive way by portraying peasants whose droll behaviour amusingly appealed to their prejudicial attitudes.⁷ Some seventeenth-century Dutch texts do indeed corroborate this point of view. Yet the strongly conventional nature of these representations attests to their status as constructs of rural life illustrating unproblematic caricatures of the rural poor fashioned for affluent city dwellers who had little or no contact with peasants in their daily lives. As Paul Vandenbroeck has persuasively argued, pictures of rustics, with their derogatory but comical illustrations of boorish, improper conduct, also served, in an entertaining manner, to affirm wealthy collectors' awareness of their behavioural and social supremacy.⁸ For we must keep in mind that during this era the

Dutch Republic, like all European countries, was characterized by distinct hierarchies of class and rank.

A Peace Treaty and the Transformation of Genre Painting

As the seventeenth century progressed, the Netherlands underwent unprecedented economic growth. Affluent citizens grew even wealthier following the signing of the Treaty of Münster in 1648, which successfully concluded the lengthy war of independence against Spain. The ensuing peace brought many salutary economic changes, especially through the expansion of maritime trade. Within a few short years after the cessation of hostilities with Spain the nation's economic vigour would reach its apogee. Needless to say, this booming economic atmosphere provided many commercial opportunities for the moneyed classes. By mid century, propitious economic circumstances began to exert a decisive impact on the art market in this country on a scale hitherto unseen. A clientele now composed mainly of the social and financial elite assumed a commanding role in the acquisition of expensive paintings and in the development of imposing art collections.

Genre paintings of the highest quality, with their rising prices, rapidly acquired the status of luxury commodities in a prosperous atmosphere in which patrons increasingly demanded pictorially sophisticated and intrinsically civilized imagery. Leading genre painters, among them, Gerrit Dou and Gerard ter Borch, began to create paintings with a new level of refinement in the renderings of textures and stuffs (see Figure 14.2), along with subtle yet sophisticated evocations of light and shadow on figures and objects placed in carefully constructed spaces, often vertical in format.⁹ And, more importantly, concomitant with these stylistic developments was a veritable explosion of paintings with wholesome, civilized subject matter. Vulgar imagery fell into gradual decline (though it would never disappear completely).

Subjects that had been near and dear to buyers early in the century continued to be painted but with lesser frequency and with some notable modifications. Prostitution, for example, was also depicted in genre painting during the second half of the seventeenth century but less frequently than during the first half. Moreover, artists active in that later period helped to disseminate a more innocuous rendition of the subject, one decidedly less coarse and raucous. Consider an



Figure 14.5 Jacob Ochtervelt, *Musical Company in an Interior*, c. 1670.

astonishingly well-preserved *Musical Company in an Interior* (Figure 14.5), painted around 1670 by Jacob Ochtervelt, a prominent Dutch artist who resided in Rotterdam. At first glance, this painting appears to portray an elegant gathering of well-heeled youths. A young woman plays a violin accompanied by a male companion on the recorder. Another man, sporting an elaborately embroidered sash, stands to the woman's left while a servant (identifiable as such because of his plainer outfit) offers wine to the group. At the entrance to the room, another woman and man converse. The picture exudes an aura of calm and finesse. Be that as

it may, the series of female portraits on the wall behind the figures discloses the true nature of its subject. There is strong evidence that real brothels displayed portraits like these to assist clients in selecting their partners.¹⁰ The unusual grouping of portraits in Ochtervelt's painting actually echoes those found in contemporary book illustrations of bordellos.¹¹

Once the significance of the background portraits has been ascertained, other motifs in Ochtervelt's painting corroborate its subject. The recorder and violin were base instruments often associated with dance halls, brothels, and other dubious establishments.¹² The aforementioned sash worn by the elegant gentleman in the left foreground has a loop at the end, which confirms that it is meant to hold a sword; the hilt of the sword overhangs the table to his left. These motifs indicate that the gentleman is a soldier. His presence here is highly appropriate as it conforms to time-honoured pictorial traditions of portraying soldiers as habitués of brothels.

Ochtervelt's sublimation of the more distasteful aspects of prostitution imagery in this canvas is standard for artists of his generation who increasingly devoted themselves to representing genteel themes, despite the presence of some literal references within it to the actual practice of this profession. In essence, the transformation of an early, sordid subject towards refined ends here is microcosmic of the thematic (and stylistic) evolution of Dutch seventeenth-century genre painting in general. Similar metamorphoses can be seen in that other popular subject in early seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting that was also discussed above: peasants. Adriaen van Ostade ranks among the most prolific Dutch painters (and print-makers) of peasant subject matter in the second half of the century.¹³ Even a brief overview of the development of this long-lived artist reveals changes in style and subject that demonstrate his participation in the ongoing transformation of Dutch genre painting as the century progressed.

Early in his career, Van Ostade consistently depicted peasants as comic caricatures who raucously embody excess. With its spotlighted barn-like setting and boisterous, drunken boors, Van Ostade's *Carousing Peasants* of c. 1632–4 (Figure 14.6) typifies his early style and approach to such imagery, which in certain respects recall Vinckboons' (see Figure 14.4). In this painting, a palette of cream colours and delicate, pastel blues and pinks has been applied against a monochromatic overlay. The colours have been brushed on quite roughly and hence capture something of the kinetic energy of the oafish revellers. Yet, scarcely

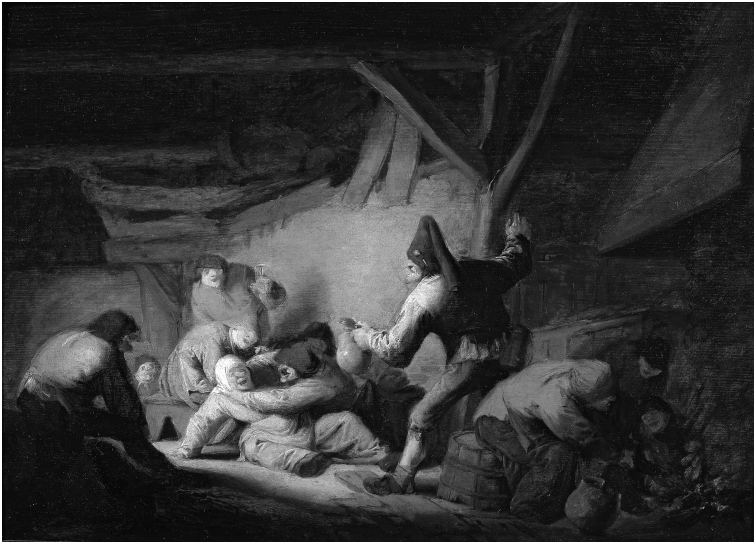


Figure 14.6 Adriaen van Ostade, *Carousing Peasants*, c. 1635.

twenty-five years later, Van Ostade's prior uproarious paintings of riot and inebriation were largely (though not entirely) supplanted by peaceful scenes of well-behaved peasants, often shown engaged in domestic activities. Consider the artist's *Interior of a Peasant Cottage* of 1668 (Figure 14.7). The palette has become markedly cooler – for instance, the bright pastel blues of the earlier painting have been replaced with a blue of a much lower intensity, one that approximates slate grey. And the application of paint is also smoother and tighter. Moreover, there is greater attention paid to detail and not merely in the picturesque proliferation of objects scattered throughout the room, which, incidentally, is now more evenly lit and expansive versus that of the *Carousing Peasants* (Figure 14.6). The earlier, frenzied scene of tumultuous abandon has been superseded by one of utter domestic tranquillity. This peasant family is sober, tender, and loving. The only significant action occurring here is that of the mother holding up a doll for her delighted child.

As was noted above, around mid century, Dutch genre painting began to undergo sweeping changes. Artists such as the aforementioned Dou and Ter Borch began to execute genre paintings of unprecedented refinement. By comparison, early seventeenth-century interiors must have seemed old-



Figure 14.7 Adriaen van Ostade, *Interior of a Peasant Cottage*, 1661.

fashioned versus their delicately illuminated, exquisitely crafted works of great narrative subtlety. Adriaen van Ostade was certainly responsive to these new technical achievements, as we have seen. But still other factors likely impacted Van Ostade's thematic innovations, foremost among them his patrons, who probably desired portrayals of well-behaved peasants because they deemed earlier ones undignified. Yet we cannot infer that affluent collectors suddenly liked peasants or were even sympathetic to their inferior social status, for sympathy with lower-class people or those in dire straits is largely a modern sentiment. Rather, by 1650, notions of

civility, good breeding, and refined taste were becoming so well entrenched that certain patrons sought to demonstrate these superlative qualities by purchasing and displaying depictions of exemplary subjects such as peasants acting responsibly and sedately within domestic settings. By comparison, older paintings of boisterous peasants, such as Van Ostade's *Carousing Peasants* (see Figure 14.6) where the frenzied action often occurs in barn-like hovels, must have struck some buyers as brutish and tasteless.

New Subject Matter

The new demand for sophisticated and intrinsically civilized work accounts for what became one of the most popular themes in all of Dutch genre painting: domesticity. Seventeenth-century Dutch artists made literally hundreds, even thousands of pictures of domestic themes. These pictures are especially popular today. The reasons for this undoubtedly reside in what we perceive as their typical 'Dutch' characteristics: they have a peculiar charm and simplicity as they seem to provide a vision of the centrality of family life in a long-vanished, democratic society. Curiously, the majority of these postdate the aforementioned Treaty of Münster of 1648. This very fact yet again militates against the tendency to view seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings at face value, as if they somehow provide documentary insights into the lives of the citizenry at that time. If this were true, the scarcity of pre-1650 paintings depicting domesticity and, conversely, the large numbers of those from the earlier era depicting women of questionable behaviour would force us to conclude implausibly that the concept of domesticity was suddenly invented around mid century and, moreover, that with equal immediacy women began to act commendably. The very impossibility of these hypotheses confirms once again how Dutch genre paintings weave clever fictions, creatively fusing observed reality with a well-established repertoire of themes, motifs, and styles in an effort to forge fanciful, conventional art.

Adriaen van Ostade played a not yet completely understood role in the development of what essentially was the new widespread theme of domesticity. Some of his etchings rank among the earliest representations of particular domestic subjects. For example, the artist's touching print of 1653 representing a poor family saying grace anticipates



Figure 14.8 Adriaen van Ostade, *Family Saying Grace*, 1653.

paintings of this subject by genre painters of the 1650s and 1660s (Figure 14.8).¹⁴ In essence, these modest and charming etchings testify to the extent to which domestic themes in Dutch art began to take hold: by the early 1650s, domesticity in art even started to encompass the portrayal of the lower classes. Nevertheless, the development of the theme of domesticated peasants in Van Ostade's paintings and prints owes something to his colleagues' paintings of domesticity because a sizeable number of genre painters were now devoting their production

to the portrayal of such imagery. A case in point is Pieter de Hooch, a contemporary of the famed Johannes Vermeer, who worked in Delft and then in Amsterdam, cities in which he painted an impressive number of pictures of domesticity and, in the process, helped to establish and popularize this imagery.¹⁵

A Mother with Her Children and a Servant of c. 1675 provides a captivating example of De Hooch's work of this sort (see Figure 14.3). This charming canvas depicts a darkened interior, wherein an attentive young mother, seated before a wicker cradle, is posed with her baby in her lap. Her older daughter stands beside her, stroking a cat, thereby offering witty parallel to the mother's care and affection for the baby. A maid has entered the room in the left distance, clutching a pail. Through the arched doorway, we see, in progression, a hallway, another room streaked with brilliant sunlight, and the right side of a window offering a partial glimpse into the leafy garden. Such elaborate combinations of space, involving a continuum of interior and exterior areas, can be encountered repeatedly in De Hooch's paintings of domesticity. Beyond their compelling structural complexity, what must have made these pictures so appealing were their impressive light effects and their active, sympathetic figures.

In connection with De Hooch, whose works invariably present intricate spatial arrangements, it is curious to note that the tremendous demand for paintings of domesticity coincided with changing patterns of house construction that distinguished public from what were, at that time, rather novel private spaces.¹⁶ Perhaps this is not surprising given the large numbers of art buyers and patrons concentrated in the urban centres that dominated the western region of the Netherlands. Mariët Westermann and C. Willemijn Fock, among others, have noted that the second half of the seventeenth century witnessed the growing differentiation of the rooms composing a domicile.¹⁷ Now designated for specific purposes in contrast to the more communal arrangements typifying earlier homes, dining rooms, bedrooms, and the like promulgated the growing desire to separate private and public spaces and hence satisfied incipient needs for privacy. In certain respects, Dutch paintings of domestic subjects (and other genre paintings) are reflective of – and perhaps even constitutive of – these emerging structural requirements for privacy, as De Hooch's canvases make abundantly clear. As Martha Hollander has perceptively observed, 'rather than claiming that Dutch artists invented private life, one might say, instead, that artists like De

Hooch were inventing a language to articulate the emergence of the concept “private life”.¹⁸

Still, if the preceding discussion has demonstrated anything, it would be a mistake to infer one-to-one correspondences between De Hooch’s pictures of domestic themes, contemporary house construction, and the lives of those who inhabited new dwellings. Elizabeth Alice Honig and Hollander have called attention to the fascinating fact that, in so many paintings of domesticity, adult male protagonists are practically non-existent.¹⁹ The tranquil spaces are therefore purposefully gendered in that they exclusively accommodate women, their domestics, and children, often portrayed in reclusive moments, secluded from the hustle and bustle of the world, the latter at best implied by views through windows, open doors, and vestibules. And that world was one which, at least theoretically, signified the domain of men from which women were excluded. But this was also a rarefied world – in art, that is. Note the large size of the room in De Hooch’s canvas, the expansive marble floor and the large impressive mantelpiece, furnishings not regularly encountered in typical Dutch homes of the period. Genre painters of the earlier seventeenth century had occasionally depicted domestic subjects and related upscale imagery but only rarely with the levels of refinement now evidenced in the work of De Hooch and innumerable contemporary masters, and so, too, never on the sheer scale now witnessed.

Fashionable representations of domesticity must have become enormously appealing and therefore provide ample information about buyer taste in a prosperous atmosphere ripe for the production and reception of such images. As the seventeenth century progressed, images of domestic virtue and other high-life subject matter (particularly depictions of courtship) naturally featured settings and activities associated with the lifestyles of the well-to-do.²⁰ The representation of domesticity became so deeply associated with luxury that even paintings with ostensibly plain settings participate in this phenomenon. The art of Johannes Vermeer offers some excellent examples. Marjorie Wieseman, H. Perry Chapman, and I have explored this aspect of Vermeer’s work, whose purpose, regardless of its subject matter, was to proffer rarefied images of cultured leisure and abundance, to fulfil the desires of his affluent and, consequently, restricted clientele.²¹ Vermeer’s patent economy of message usually matches his economy of means. *The Lacemaker* (Figure 14.9), to cite just one example, lacks the



Figure 14.9 Johannes Vermeer, *The Lacemaker*, c. 1670–1.

constellation of motifs found in other paintings of this theme that serve to celebrate time-honoured notions of domestic virtue. Yet the figure's very beauty and fashionability embody the work's import, one also implied by its title when it was auctioned in 1696: 'Een juffertje dat speldewerkt' ('A young lady doing needlework').²² During the seventeenth century, the designation 'juffertje' (young lady) bespoke a level of social distinction.²³ The person who compiled this auction list must have recognized straightaway the status of this diligent young lady who sports a bright yellow bodice. Even the sole piece of furniture in the

ill-defined space in this picture suggests this: it is a wooden table specially designed for the purpose of practising needle arts. What we see then is no mere craftsman but an elegant maiden, practising a skill that for contemporaries signalled feminine accomplishment within polite or upper-class society.

The steep cost of many of the pictures of the calibre under consideration here – the average price of a single painting by Vermeer, to cite just one instance, equalled an annual middle-class salary – all but ensured that they were destined for wealthy elite buyers.²⁴ The creators of such paintings often had stable relationships with their affluent patrons, which granted them the liberty to work laboriously for extended periods of time on truly magnificent and costly renderings of fashionable subject matter. In Vermeer's case, many of his pictures were owned by Pieter Claesz van Ruijven and Maria de Knuijt, an immensely wealthy Delft couple who probably purchased them as soon as the artist completed them.²⁵ The art of Vermeer and his fellow painters, in turn, had the capacity to elicit aesthetic and thematic responses among prospective purchasers, whose social status and lifestyles were analogous to what was represented therein.

Conclusion

In sum, it was the taste and related collecting habits of the elite, then, that ensured a ready market for the new types of pictures being produced after 1650, as they responded enthusiastically to specific stylistic and thematic changes introduced into Dutch genre painting. In the end, the emergence of images of domestic virtue and other wholesome themes in Dutch art was brought about by changing social and economic circumstances just as much as by evolving aesthetic and stylistic concerns. If anything, this once again demonstrates that these pictures, just like those painted in earlier decades, are not at all 'documentary'. Yet, despite or perhaps even because of their deceptive appearance, genre paintings provide a wealth of information about seventeenth-century Dutch culture, its predilections, its prejudices, and its very mindset.

Notes

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2. C. W. Fock, 'Semblance or Reality? The Domestic Interior in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting', in *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, Newark Museum, 2001–2, 83–101.
3. W. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution*, New Haven, 2004, 1–2, with references to other literature on conventionality in art.
4. The economic history of seventeenth-century Dutch art has been studied extensively since the 1990s. C. Rasterhoff, 'Economic Aspects of Dutch Art', in W. Franits (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century*, London, 2016, 355–71, provides a historiographic overview. In Chapter 13 of the present book, Rasterhoff writes about luxury markets in the Dutch Republic.
5. Among the few studies of prostitution in seventeenth-century Dutch art is L. C. van de Pol, 'The Whore, the Bawd and the Artist: The Reality and Imagery of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Prostitution', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2 (2010).
6. Van de Pol, 'The Whore, the Bawd and the Artist'; L. van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore: Prostitution in Early Modern Amsterdam*, Oxford, 2011.
7. K. Moxey, 'Pieter Bruegel and Popular Culture', in *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, Bridgestone Museum of Art, 1989, 42–52, provides a comprehensive review of the often conflicting interpretations of peasants in sixteenth-century art, focusing on Pieter Bruegel the Elder.
8. P. Vandenbroeck, 'Verbeeck's Peasant Weddings: A Study of Iconography and Social Function', *Simiolus* 14 (1984), 118–19.
9. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 99–134.
10. A. Roos, *Den Amsteldamsen Diogenes, of philosophische bloemhof*, Utrecht, 1684, 164, no. 13.
11. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 201, fig. 188.
12. *Music and Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder, *Music and Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, The Hague, 1994, cat. nos. 14, 24, 39, where the licentious associations of these instruments are discussed.
13. P. Pagan (ed.), *Images of Women in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Domesticity and the Representation of the Peasant*, Athens, GA, 1996; A. Ebert, *Adriaen van Ostade und die komische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 2013.
14. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 138.
15. P. C. Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch*, Ithaca, 1980.
16. J. Loughman and J. M. Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses*, Zwolle, 2000, 19–50.
17. M. Westermann, '"Costly and Curious, Full of Pleasure and Home Contentment": Making Home in the Dutch Republic', in *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, Newark Art Museum, 2001, 24–31; C. W. Fock, '1650–1700', in C. W. Fock (ed.), *Het Nederlandse interieur in beeld 1600–1900*, Zwolle, 2001–2, 81–179.
18. M. Hollander, 'Public and Private Life in the Art of Pieter de Hooch', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 51 (2000), 287.
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20. W. E. Franits, 'Gabriel Metsu and the Art of Luxury', in Exhib. cat. *Gabriel Metsu*, National Gallery of Ireland, 2010, 53–71; W. E. Franits, 'Living in the Lap of Luxury: Vermeer, His Admirers and His Patrons', in *Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence*, Fitzwilliam Museum, 2011–12, 124–51.
 21. M. E. Wieseman, 'Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence', in *Vermeer's Women*, 2–63; H. P. Chapman, 'Inside Vermeer's Women', in *Vermeer's Women*, 64–123.
 22. J. M. Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History*, Princeton, 1989, 363–4.
 23. A. Blankert and L. P. Grijp, 'An Adjustable Leg and a Book: Lacemakers by Vermeer and Others, and Bredero's *Groot Lied-boeck* in One by Dou', in C. P. Schneider et al. (eds.), *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive Presented on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, Cambridge, MA, 1995, 40.
 24. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, 172.
 25. Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu*, 246–53.

The World of Literature

Literature was a phenomenon of central importance in Dutch Golden Age society. Although much less well known today than the works of painting, architecture, and music that can be appreciated without knowledge of the language, the literary production of the Dutch Republic was in fact remarkable, in both quality and quantity, and played a significant part in the lives of most urban dwellers in the country. Authors such as Roemer Visscher, Gerbrand Adriaensz Bredero, Pieter Cornelisz Hooft, Jacob Cats, and Joost van den Vondel gained fame during their lifetime. They developed a rich vernacular language, and their work contributed to the shaping of Dutch religious, political, and civic identities.

The public function of literature was taken for granted. Poets and playwrights saw it as their primary task to instruct and delight audiences for the greater good of the community. This social dimension was visible in the propagation of civic and religious morals, in overt or oblique interventions in public debates, and in the glorification of the local, regional, or indeed national heritage. Nor was literature restricted to the elite. Scandals and public controversies drew raucous satires, just as natural disasters and military victories were commemorated in topical verse and song. Special occasions in a burgher's life, such as marriages and births, were celebrated with the recitation of poetry, and men, women, and even children exchanged poems to offer consolation, convey thanks, or send New Year's wishes. In all these ways literature helped create and maintain social bonds within the steadily expanding urban communities of the Dutch Republic.

The social roles that literature played are reflected in the variety of media in which it was disseminated. While most literary works

appeared in the form of printed books and broadsheets, the circulation of manuscripts still flourished, as is illustrated, for example, by the rhymes in the *alba amicorum* (lit. 'books of friends', the forerunners to autograph books) that were fashionable among the wealthier burghers, male and female alike. Oral transmission, too, remained important. Singing and reciting poetry, both in private homes and in public, were common occurrences, depicted in numerous paintings and drawings. Even in material culture literature left its imprint. Epigrams might be carved or engraved on public buildings, tombstones, goblets, and even humble utensils to honour the owner or the object, praise God, or admonish the beholder.

The social and political functions of literature have received much attention in recent Anglophone scholarship. As for Dutch literature, readers unfamiliar with the Dutch language will find it hard to gain access to both the primary and many of the secondary sources of the literary history of the Dutch Republic. For this reason, the present chapter restricts itself to charting developments with reference to the more canonical works of prose, poetry, and drama. Using a necessarily broad brush it describes how, at the end of the sixteenth century, the centre of literary production in the Low Countries shifted from Antwerp to Amsterdam, and how, in the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic created a vernacular literature of extraordinary diversity and vitality.

1560–1590: War and Metrics

In August 1561 a remarkable event took place in Antwerp, then the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the Low Countries and their cultural and economic centre. The occasion was a drama competition organized by one of the city's literary associations or Chambers of Rhetoric. A late medieval phenomenon with origins in northern France and Burgundy, Chambers of Rhetoric dominated literary production in the Low Countries throughout the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth. They specialized in allegorical plays and formally sophisticated verse. Virtually every town, and many villages, especially in the southern part of the Low Countries, had at least one Chamber. Closely tied to local power structures, the Chambers shaped civic culture and gave verbal and visual expression to the communal self-image. Although the forms of literary production changed significantly in the

seventeenth century, the social function of literature remained constant. Verse as well as drama was meant to yield more than just aesthetic pleasure.

Nowhere was this public role more in evidence than at the event held in Antwerp in August 1561. As the participating Chambers entered the city in festive fashion, the locals gaped at some 1,300 men on horseback and thousands more on foot, all in colourful attire, with more than 200 floats carrying elaborate allegorical representations. The main contest lasted for two weeks, with plays being performed several times a day in the city's main square; a further series of performances of minor plays stretched into September. The whole competition was an extraordinary display of wealth, power, and self-confidence. The message was not lost on the Englishman Richard Clough, Sir Thomas Gresham's agent in Antwerp, who in a letter home urged his compatriots to take note 'and so provyde for the tyme to come', because, he concluded, 'they that can do thys, can do more'.¹

The time to come, however, did not favour Antwerp, although the calamities did not set in right away. By the end of the 1560s the city could boast a new town hall in magnificent Renaissance style, and Christopher Plantin, by now the largest printer-publisher in Europe, had begun producing the eight sumptuous volumes of his polyglot *Biblia Regia* (1568–72). But the storm clouds had been gathering even in 1561. In previous decades the Chambers of Rhetoric had already come under suspicion of being too welcoming to the ideas of the Reformation. For all its festive pomp, the authorities closely monitored the 1561 competition. Before the decade was out, the widespread discontent with Habsburg rule in the Low Countries spilled over into armed conflict and, eventually, full-scale revolt, repression, and war. For Antwerp the first blow came in 1576 when mutinous Spanish-Habsburg troops sacked the city, burned the new town hall to a shell and forced Plantin to pay repeated ransoms to save his printing presses.

Around 1580 the major cities in the southern Low Countries – Antwerp, Ghent, Brussels – were all in rebel hands, as were large parts of Zeeland and Holland, Amsterdam having joined the Revolt in 1578. Within a few years, however, the Habsburg army, under its brilliant general Alexander Farnese, had retaken the southern bastions one by one. Antwerp was the last to fall, in 1585. In the years immediately following, its population was reduced by half, as thousands of Protestants left the city and journeyed north. In the next century the

southern provinces of the Low Countries would see every aspect of their cultural life determined by the Counter-Reformation. The ideological divide between the Catholic Spanish-Habsburg Netherlands in the south and the Calvinist-dominated Dutch Republic in the north proved permanent. Within decades Amsterdam had replaced Antwerp as the new commercial and cultural centre of gravity, a publishing hub, and the place where Dutch theatre, in particular, flourished.

As the war raged, the rebels found succour and comfort in pamphlets and songs. The most famous of these songs, reprinted in many editions of the *Beggars' Song Book* (*Geuzenliedboek*) from c. 1577 onwards, was the 'Wilhelmus', in which the leader of the Revolt, William of Nassau (or William of Orange), speaks in the first person to justify his opposition to the Spanish tyranny. Combining the first letter of each of the song's fifteen stanzas spells William's name in an acrostic – a reminder of the clever formal games typical of the Chambers of Rhetoric. The 'Wilhelmus' was adopted as the Dutch national anthem in 1936; its authorship has remained uncertain. A very different product of the conflict was the *Beehive of the Holy Romish Church* which appeared pseudonymously in 1569 but was authored by Philips of Marnix, who would become William's right-hand man. The book, written in exuberant Rabelaisian prose, is a brutal satire on the Catholic Church. Literature of this kind, the direct outcome of violent conflict, was instrumental in shaping political debate.²

The latter half of the sixteenth century was also a period of incipient literary change. Metrical verse and new poetic forms such as sonnets and emblems reached the Low Countries via France. The Antwerp patrician Jan van der Noot wrote metrical poems with remarkable ease. In Leiden it was the town secretary, Jan van Hout, who championed the new style of writing verse. Recent scholarship has stressed the role of social networks in the dissemination of literary ideas and practices, and documented Van Hout's wide circle of friends and acquaintances both in Leiden, with its newly established university (1575), and in Amsterdam. It has also highlighted two rather different conceptions of poetry which both gained purchase at the time. Whereas Van Hout viewed poets in neo-Platonic terms as divinely inspired exponents of the creative imagination, others, such as Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert, saw poetry, and literature in general, as a rhetorically refined instrument of moral persuasion.

Coornhert has come to be appreciated as the towering figure of his generation. A fiercely independent thinker and prolific writer, he produced songs, translations, plays, polemical dialogues and essays, and a supreme work of prose, *Ethics, or the Art of Living Well* (*Zedekunst, dat is wellevenskunste*, 1586). The first *Ethics* to be printed in a European vernacular, the book's lucid, vivid, and rhythmical language made it a perfect vehicle for Coornhert's unconventional ideas about the innate goodness of man, who goes astray only if he declines to learn how to distinguish between good and evil. Insight and judgement could be attained by reasoning, in the firm knowledge of God's benevolence. At a time of growing ideological entrenchment on both Catholic and Calvinist sides, Coornhert's outspoken aversion to dogma was not welcomed by everyone.

1590–1620: Immigrants and Innovators

In a lecture of 1964 the literary historian W. A. P. Smit charted a new course for the study of early modern Dutch drama, recommending a poetological approach that would trace the formal features and evolution of traditional and modernizing plays of the period.³ Smit's lecture inspired a generation of researchers to map theatrical genres and practices. The current scholarly consensus about the formal development of early modern Dutch drama is a direct result of Smit's programme. Subsequent generations, however, struck out in other directions. They turned their attention to popular literature, in both prose and verse.⁴ This type of research brought the audience into view, as book-buyers, theatre-goers, or, more generally, consumers of cultural goods. The interaction between cultural producers, recipients, and institutions has produced some of the most insightful research of recent decades. One offshoot of this type of work has been the investigation of social and artistic networks that carried the traffic in cultural meaning among both elite and broader communities. The way in which the numerous southern immigrants, displaced by the upheavals of war, gradually integrated into the social fabric of Holland's towns in the decades around 1600 provides a good example.

Although Karel van Mander (1548–1606) and Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655) belonged to different generations, both had southern origins. Van Mander, who had trained as an artist and gone on a grand tour

to Italy, left his native Flanders for Haarlem in 1583, the same year that Heinsius' parents departed Ghent and took their three-year-old son to Zeeland. Van Mander became the leading light in a network of artists and poets in and around Haarlem, and gained fame as the author of *The Book of Painters* (*Het Schilder-Boeck*, 1604), written in imitation of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Italian Painters*. Its opening section offers an extended reflection, in verse, on the nature, techniques, and moral purpose of the art of painting. The most valuable part, even for today's art historians, is that devoted to biographies of Netherlandish painters, primarily of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, every account enlivened with anecdote and detail.

Daniel Heinsius would prove at least equally influential, but as a scholar and poet. Primarily known as a neo-Latin writer who taught for decades at Leiden University, it was precisely his standing in the humanist world of letters that proved inspirational when he turned his hand to Dutch-language verse. His early collection of love emblems *You Ask What Love Is?* (*Quaeris quid sit amor?*, 1601) and its sequel, *Cupid's Craft* (*Het ambacht van Cupido*, 1613), featured both Dutch and Latin verse (the later collection added French as well), excelled in witty and paradoxical treatments of the subject, and went through a series of reprints. His *Dutch Poems* (*Nederduytsche poemata*, 1616) collected his major poems in the vernacular. The book's dedication, written by Petrus Scriverius, recalled Ronsard and Du Bartas, and celebrated the fact that now in Holland, too, a poet steeped in the classics honoured his native tongue by writing verse in it. The vindication of Dutch as a language of learned literature was put to the test in the long hymn 'In Praise of Bacchus' ('Lofsanck van Bacchus', first published separately in 1614), to which Scriverius penned extensive annotations to explain Heinsius' erudite classical allusions.

Heinsius also left his mark on drama. His theoretical treatise *On Plot in Tragedy* (*De tragoediae constitutione*, 1611) set out the Aristotelian principles of tragedy in an accessible fashion and would be studied by playwrights across Europe. His own Latin play, *William of Orange, or Wounded Liberty* (*Auriacus, sive libertas saucia*, 1602), written ten years earlier, followed Seneca rather than Aristotle in depicting the murder of the Father of the Fatherland in 1584, but it was the first in a long line of plays, by a variety of authors, on a patriotic theme; the fact that its epilogue explicitly looked forward from the anxious time of the murder to the

present day of the spectators made it doubly topical – and reassuring for those who had witnessed the rapid consolidation of the new state during the 1590s.

Among its earliest imitations in Dutch was *The Murderous Crime of Balthasar Gerards* (*Het moordadich stuck van Balthasar Gerards*, 1606) by Jacob Duym (1547–before 1624), another southern immigrant, who knew both Van Mander and Heinsius but had more of an axe to grind: he had been imprisoned by the Spanish under such harsh conditions that for the rest of his life he walked with a limp. In political terms he was, not surprisingly, a hard-liner; his play, named after William of Orange's murderer, advocated a continuation of the war with Spain at a time when the prospect of peace negotiations was being mooted – the Twelve Years' Truce would be signed in 1609.

Both plays show the close connection between literature and public discourse. Whereas Duym sought to influence policy-making by stirring up public opinion, Heinsius helped to create a public narrative in which the fledgling state – the Dutch Republic was a state before it was a nation – could reflect on its own emergence. The staged portrayal of a recognizable figure from the recent past, and the mixture of trepidation and hope which both plays projected, lent that narrative unusual force. Other narratives would soon follow.

The presence of so many immigrants in the towns of Holland and Zeeland could not fail to stir resentment among the native population. No other play satirized these tensions better than *The Spanish Brabanter* (*Spaanschen Brabander*, 1617) by Gerbrand Adriaensz Bredero. Bredero was born and bred in Amsterdam, and although he had had no classical training he entertained close contacts with the leading literary circles in his home city. He died young, at the age of thirty-three, but still produced a large number of – posthumously collected – lyrical, narrative, and meditative poems, as well as a string of comedies, tragicomedies, and shorter farces, several of them derived from Spanish romances, which he read in French or Dutch translations. *The Spanish Brabanter* takes its cue from the Spanish picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*, but the scene is set in Amsterdam. The long, sprawling play was nominally made up of five acts, although it might be better described as a series of vignettes showing the interactions between the Spanish Brabanter Jerolimo, newly arrived in Amsterdam from Antwerp, his Amsterdam-born servant Robbeknol, and a variety of colourful local characters. Jerolimo's Antwerp accent, grand manner, and flashy clothes suggest

a man of wealth ('Is Amsterdam for sale?', he wonders), and he dupes most of the locals most of the time. The humour in the play springs from the clash of dialects, the sheer bizarreness of some of the characters, and their down-to-earth speech. Robbeknol offers pithy comments on the goings-on throughout, but when in the end Jerolimo turns out to be as penniless as he himself is, he sides with his master. There are no heroes in *The Spanish Brabanter*.

Among Bredero's contacts in Amsterdam were the patrician Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft, the son a mayor of the city, and Samuel Coster, a doctor. Their generation marked a new beginning in Dutch literature, symbolized in the establishment of the ambitious but short-lived Dutch Academy (*Nederduytsche Academie*) in 1617. Their circle also included the two most famous literary women of the period, the sisters Anna Roemers Visscher and Maria Tesselschade Visscher. It was their father, Roemer Visscher, and his friend Hendrik Laurenszoon Spiegel who, a generation earlier, had helped prepare the ground for the new developments.

Both Roemer Visscher and Spiegel were well-to-do merchants, with an aversion to the religious disputes of the day and a philosophical interest in a Christianized form of stoicism as a practical way of life. Spiegel, for many years the key figure in the Amsterdam Chamber of Rhetoric, the *Eglantine*, was also the principal author of the first grammar of Dutch to appear in print, the *Dialogue on Dutch Grammar* (*Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst*, 1584). The book was published under the Chamber's name, with a preface by Dirck Coornhert in which he extolled the virtues of Dutch and expressed his support for Spiegel's linguistic purism. The codification of the vernacular formed part of a wider programme of conscious cultivation of the language, regarded as a cornerstone in the construction of a national identity. It saw a number of writers deliberately avoiding foreign loanwords and choosing to use Dutch for subjects such as botany and political theory for which hitherto Latin had been the standard vehicle. The 1584 grammar was followed by shorter works on rhetoric and dialectics; together, the three disciplines – grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics – constituted the *trivium*, the basis of all further study. Spiegel recommended the use of Dutch even at Leiden University but, while that suggestion fell on deaf ears, in 1600 the mathematician Simon Stevin, another linguistic purist, set up a training institute for engineers

and navigators in Leiden which taught applied sciences exclusively in Dutch.

Spiegel's main literary work was the posthumously published *Mirror of the Heart* (*Hert-spiegel*, 1614; the title puns on the writer's own name), a long meditative poem expounding ethical principles akin to those held by Coornhert: virtue is its own reward, and knowledge of one's self and of the world will yield a true apprehension of moral duty. Linguistically *Mirror of the Heart* has proved one of the most challenging poems in Dutch, due to its compact diction and the numerous freshly minted compounds that came with Spiegel's insistent purism. His short play *Numa, or Refusing Office* (*Numa ofte amptsweygerinhe*), which employed a more accessible idiom but remained unpublished at the time, took its story-line from a French translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* to depict the Sabine Numa weighing stoic self-sufficiency against public duty before finally agreeing to become king of both Sabines and Romans. Doing good for others trumps self-improvement.

While Visscher shared Spiegel's philosophical and linguistic preferences, he excelled in shorter genres such as epigrams, sonnets, and emblems. His sense of irony showed when he titled his collected verse *Jabberings* (*Brabbeling*, 1614) and invented a curious new Dutch word to designate his book of emblems as *Sinnepoppen* (1614), a coinage he explained in the preface as 'pictures pregnant with meaning'. The pictures in this latter book were often strikingly homely, showing sluices, haystacks, millstones, ploughs, fishing vessels, men skating, and women churning milk to butter. If the images conjured up familiar scenes of everyday life, Visscher took care also to ensure the verbal commentary had immediate appeal: headings in Latin or French were glossed in Dutch, and the short prose commentaries praised the entrepreneurial values of Holland's merchant class. The recognizable, everyday quality of Visscher's emblems found echoes later in the century in a poetics that favoured personal experience over grand ideas or pathos.

Visscher's house in Amsterdam became a meeting place for artists, writers, and scholars. Among his children, the gifted Anna and Maria Tesselschade gained fame both as poets in their own right and as translators from French and Italian. Most of their work, however, remained tucked away in private correspondence or appeared in the form of contributions to fellow writers' collections. No independent publications appeared under their own names during their lifetime.

Among those who frequented Visscher's house was Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft. As early as 1600, as a young man on a three-year grand tour, he had addressed a letter in verse, sent from Florence, to his fellow members of the Amsterdam Chamber, the Eglantine. In it he contrasted Italy's wondrous achievements in the arts with Holland's mere promise, but he ended his missive by celebrating the inspirational role Spiegel and Visscher were playing in the city's literary life. After his return to Amsterdam Hooft himself grew into a major author, known for his elegant poetic diction. His fifty-odd sonnets, most of them on Petrarchan motifs, combined grace, wit, and linguistic ingenuity. His pastoral play *Granida* (1605) introduced a new genre, after Italian models. Its love intrigue appealed to younger audiences, a new and lucrative market for which in subsequent decades a large number of amorous songbooks would be published all over the country.

Hooft's tragedy *Gerard van Velsen* (*Geeraerd van Velsen*, 1613) was of a different calibre. It took its theme from national history, addressed the political issues of the day, and contributed to the literary invention of the Dutch Republic as an independent state. In formal and structural terms, too, it proved innovative: it was the first Dutch play to refer to the – loosely interpreted – Aristotelian unities, evidence that Hooft was aware of Daniel Heinsius' theoretical work. Its popularity can be gauged from several sequels produced by other writers, and from regular stage performances throughout the century.

The play is set not far from Amsterdam, in Muyden Castle, which happened to be Hooft's official residence at the time. The story, based on events that took place in Holland in 1296, revolves around the rash actions of some nobles who, led by Gerard van Velsen, conspire against their tyrannical count, take him prisoner, and then start deliberating what to do next. Before they reach a conclusion they are surprised by loyal supporters of the count; they flee, and Van Velsen kills his prisoner. The voice of reason in the play is that of one of the nobles, Gysbert van Aemstel, who has been lured into the conspiracy and advocates a constitutional solution to the question of how to depose the tyrant. His arguments rehearse those of the rebels in the early decades of the Revolt, as most audiences and readers would have recognized. The play thus helped to legitimize the emergence of the new Dutch state, even as it painted the dire consequences of Van Velsen's personal vindictiveness. The play ends much as Heinsius' *Auriacus* had, with a long monologue that looked forward from the discord and turmoil caused by Van

Velsen's actions to the glorious present – but with a warning that moderation and prudence were required if another debacle was to be forestalled. In 1613, well into the Twelve Years' Truce, as doctrinaire tensions between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants were beginning to escalate, that message was unmistakable.

Hooft's other major play, *Baeto* (1616), tapped into another patriotic vein but was overtaken by events as soon as the ink was dry. The protagonist's name in the title refers to the so-called Batavian myth, the nationalist piece of propaganda, fed by Hugo Grotius' treatise *On the Antiquity of the Batavian Republic* published in both Latin and Dutch in 1610, which held that the Dutch descended from the Batavi, a Germanic tribe that in pre-Roman times had migrated from the Germanic heartland to – roughly – contemporary Holland. Grotius had also argued, anachronistically, that the Batavi possessed constitutional arrangements similar to those of the Dutch Republic. Hooft's tragedy took its cue from a brief passage in Tacitus' *Germania* and showed the virtuous Baeto, a Germanic crown prince, being grievously wronged but refusing to resort to violence even in self-defence, choosing instead to leave his homeland and move west with his followers, giving his name to the new nation of the Batavi. The play thus enacted a foundation myth on a national scale, but it also spoke to the here and now, and not only in counselling non-violence. A crucial scene towards the end of the play has the chief priestess ceding first place to Baeto as the leader of the new nation: the secular power stood above the clergy; the head of state united the whole nation. When in July 1617 Stadholder Maurice of Nassau openly sided with the Counter-Remonstrants, that lofty message fell by the wayside. Less than a year later Maurice was in Amsterdam, where scenes from *Gerard van Velsen* were staged in his honour; *Baeto* was wisely kept out of view. The play was not printed or performed until 1626, after Maurice's death.

The performances in Maurice's honour in May 1618 were organized in part by a new body, the Dutch Academy. It had broken away from the traditionally minded Chamber of Rhetoric, the Eglantine, a year earlier at the instigation of Bredero, Hooft, and Samuel Coster to pursue a culturally more progressive line. The aim was to run courses, in Dutch, in a range of subjects and to perform modern plays, in a new, specially designed building, and for money. Whereas traditionally plays had been performed in the open air and for free, now theatre moved indoors and charged an entrance fee. The commercialization of the

stage became more pronounced as the century wore on. But the Academy closed its doors after little more than a year. Coster's play *Iphigenia* (1617), although set at a safe distance, among the Greek army readying itself for the Trojan War, was such a transparent attack on the Calvinist clergy that it could not be performed in public for years. The Counter-Remonstrant victory in 1618–19 sealed the Academy's fate. Coster fell silent, and Hooft turned to historiography.

1620–1640: Public Appeal and Intervention

Jacob Cats hailed from Zeeland and trained as a lawyer, but as pensionary of Dordrecht and then grand pensionary he spent much of his time in The Hague. He was an ineffectual politician but far and away the most successful Dutch author of the period, and his books sold in the tens of thousands. His *Marriage* (*Houwelick*, 1625), an 800-page tome, was reported to have sold 50,000 copies in a little more than twenty-five years. Most of his other books did equally well. He collected his own *Complete Works* (*Alle de wercken*) in 1655 and was widely translated and imitated in Germany and England. His reputation remained high until the middle of the nineteenth century but then dipped, only to recover somewhat in recent decades, as his work began to be read through the lens of the history of ideas.

Cats' eminently accessible verse, with its regular iambic beat and its patterns of repetition and variation, articulated the prevailing moral precepts of the age, especially the proprieties governing love and married life. He wore his erudition lightly and displayed tireless ingenuity in devising cautionary tales and extracting moral lessons from everyday scenes. He excelled in expository and narrative verse, but made his reputation with a book of emblems that, for the first time, fully exploited the genre's potential. In this, his most famous collection, first published in 1618 but known as *Images of Allegory and Love* (*Sinnen minnebeelden*) after its revised edition of 1627, each image was followed by interpretation in three languages (Dutch, Latin, and French; the 1627 edition added English) aimed at three age groups: a light-hearted amorous reading for the young, an ethical reading addressing the business of everyday life for the middle-aged, and a contemplative or religious reading for those with one foot in the grave. The formula had commercial advantages – an important consideration for what was evidently an

expensive book, although many later editions were printed in smaller formats and on cheap paper.

Also in 1618 Cats brought out another emblem book, *Maidens' Duty* (*Maechden-plicht*), now bilingual Latin and Dutch, in the form of a dialogue between two women. More works on relations between the sexes followed. *Marriage* (*Houwelick*, 1625), divided into six sections tracing a woman's progression through life from girlhood via motherhood to widowhood, presented the married state, with its stereotypical division of responsibilities between husband and wife, as the basis of a Christian society. *Wedding Ring* (*Trou-ringh*, 1637), a series of verse narratives about various kinds of preludes to conjugal bliss, was dedicated to the polyglot (but unmarried) Anna Maria van Schurman, one of the intellectual marvels of the age.

Apart from poetry, drama remained a key instrument to work on public opinion while providing entertainment. As the Chambers of Rhetoric declined, theatrical life found a new focus in Amsterdam with the construction of the Amsterdam Theatre, a splendid edifice in classical style which opened its doors in 1638. This was the first purpose-built, professional theatre in the Low Countries, with twice-weekly performances, paid actors, and a capacity of close to a thousand spectators. Since the proceeds went to charity, the local authority had a vested interest in the theatre's commercial success, despite opposition to all forms of theatre voiced by hard-line Calvinist preachers. The Amsterdam Theatre provided a significant stimulus to drama production, both original works and translations. The first play to be put on, early in January 1638, was *Gysbreght van Aemstel* by Joost van den Vondel.

Canonized as the national poet at an early stage, Vondel was nevertheless something of an outsider. He grew up in Mennonite circles and later converted to Catholicism. He was the leading playwright of his age with thirty-three plays to his name, although almost half remained unperformed during his lifetime. Known for his high classicizing style, he belonged to the middle class and ran a shop. Uneasy in the company of social grandees such as Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft and Constantijn Huygens, he taught himself Latin in his mid twenties and learned Greek when he was in his fifties.

Vondel was intensely interested in the country's political and economic life, and he did not hide his opinions. The major poem of his early career, 'In Praise of Navigation' ('Het lof der Zee-vaert'),

first appeared in 1623 as a liminary piece in a cartographic atlas, *Mirror of the Sea* (*Zeespiegel*), published by Willem Jansz Blaeu, who specialized in reference works for seafarers. The poem's almost five hundred alexandrines describe a ship setting out on a voyage to the Indies and safely returning home after a successful trading mission. Vondel's theme was the ethical foundation of this trade as fair and peaceful commerce – a clear political statement at a time when in the Indies the governor of the East India Company (VOC), Jan Pieterszoon Coen, was using brutal methods to subdue local populations and head off competitors. In his play *Palamedes* (1625), published soon after Prince Maurice's death, Vondel took aim at the Counter-Remonstrants he held responsible for the execution of Oldenbarnevelt in 1619, although, like Coster before him, he set the scene in ancient Greece. He incurred a fine, and the play was banned but, due to ineffective censorship laws in a decentralized country, was reprinted several times. Vondel kept up his attacks on hard-line Calvinist preachers and magistrates in vicious satires such as *Curry-Comb* (*Roskam*, 1626) and *Harpoon* (*Harpoen*, 1630).

By the mid 1630s Vondel had written three original plays and translated several more from the Latin of Seneca and Hugo Grotius. Among the many plays that followed, three stand out: *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637), his most popular; *Lucifer* (1654), his most ambitious; and *Jeptha* (1659), his model tragedy. *Gysbreght van Aemstel* continued the story line of Hooft's *Gerard van Velsen* and showed Van Aemstel, now returned from exile, being besieged in his city of Amsterdam by an army still hostile to him. The city falls due to a ruse modelled on the Trojan horse and is destroyed, forcing Van Aemstel and his family to flee again. If the play's language and theatricals were remarkable, so were the intertextual references and the symbolism Vondel wove into his verse. The Trojan horse and Van Aemstel's flight (at the behest of the angel Raphael) echoed Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Vondel elaborated the parallel in some detail. To this epic grandeur he added Christmas and Innocents' Day, as Amsterdam's tragedy takes place on Christmas Eve, and indeed the play would have been first performed on Boxing Day 1637 had its alleged Catholic tenor not led to the premiere being postponed. The combination of classical and Christian imitation, the promise of greatness to come, and the power of Vondel's poetry made *Gysbreght van Aemstel* the most successful play of the period, a celebration of Amsterdam on the city's own stage.

1640–1670: Popular and Elite Literature

Around or shortly after the time he wrote *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, Vondel learned ancient Greek, translated Sophocles, and re-oriented his conception of drama away from Seneca and towards Aristotle. The most spectacular result of this re-orientation was *Lucifer*, a play about the first mishap in the history of the universe, set among the angels in heaven, and dedicated to the emperor Ferdinand III, in whom Vondel saw the leader of the entire Christian world against an existential Ottoman threat. The play's action concerned God's decision to alter the existing order of things, Lucifer's wavering between loyal service and hurt pride as he sees his privileged position undermined, and his fateful rebellion, which ends in inevitable defeat and his transformation into a monstrous devil. The theological and political complexities of Lucifer's revolt against an apparently absolutist God have been the subject of critical debate to this day. On the Amsterdam stage *Lucifer* ran into problems after just two performances, as the church council objected to the heavenly setting. The play was banned but, true to form, went through five print runs within a year.

The reception of *Jeptha* five years later suggested that Vondel's classicism could produce great plays but left audiences cold. The story was that of the biblical Jeptha who vowed to God, in return for victory in battle, to sacrifice the first thing he encountered on his way home, only to find his daughter coming out to meet him. Representations of the episode in painting invariably showed the tragic moment when a dumbstruck Jeptha sees his daughter and realizes what he has done. It was a measure of Vondel's boldness as a dramatist that, in order to comply with both the biblical Word and the Aristotelian unities, he dispensed with this shock of recognition, moved the scene forward in time until two months after the fateful encounter, and focused on Jeptha's anguish and desperate self-justification in the hours leading up to the actual sacrifice, as he refuses to translate his private – and ultimately illusory – bond with God into a socially acceptable form.

In its printed edition, *Jeptha* was preceded by a lengthy theoretical exposition. On the Amsterdam stage it lost out to the visually more exciting work of playwrights like Jan Vos, who made ample use of the elaborate stage equipment available in the new Theatre. Many of these plays were drawn from contemporary French and Spanish sources, and they featured complicated intrigues, sensational turns of events, and

large amounts of blood and gore. Their popular success made Vondel's classicism look like a lonely position, and they dominated the repertoire to such an extent that in 1664 the Theatre was rebuilt to accommodate the stage machinery necessary to mount even the most spectacular scenes. Towards the end of the 1660s, playwrights working in this vein also began to furnish theoretical defences of their practice.

The cloak-and-dagger plays on the Amsterdam stage had their counterpart in popular narrative prose. From around the middle of the century a good number of novels began to appear, most of them translated from French, treating colourful adventures or amorous intrigues. A special but commercially successful category of prose consisted of travel narratives, in particular those relating naval voyages to exotic lands. They had been appearing since the end of the previous century. Gerrit de Veer's account of three successive but fruitless expeditions to find a north-east passage to China, the last one ending in the famous winter spent on Nova Zembla (Novaya Zemlya), had first come out in 1598 and had sold extremely well. None gained a wider readership than the *Journal* of Willem Ysbrandtszoon Bontekoe. The book appeared in 1646, twenty years after Bontekoe had returned from his journeys around the East Indies and along the southern coast of China, and it had been thoroughly rewritten by the publisher to portray the VOC skipper as a resourceful Christian hero.

If the average reader might hope to identify with the persona projected in Bontekoe's journal, the poetry of the aristocratic Constantijn Huygens, private secretary to successive princes of Orange for more than half a century, stood at the opposite end of the scale. Multi-talented, multi-lingual, and with a fondness for dense language games, Huygens had been writing verse from a young age. This was poetry for elite readers. One long poem, 'Daily Business' ('Dagh-werck'), left unfinished in 1638, proved so dense he supplied a prose commentary to it. The first major collection, *Otia* ('Leisure Hours', 1625), featured poems in Latin, French, Italian, and Dutch. Despite the volume's cosmopolitanism, some of the Dutch verses were mildly satirical observations on Huygens' immediate surroundings in The Hague, while others celebrated Dutch localities and trades. It was not until the 1640s that more work began to appear in print, first the Latin poetry collected in *Momenta desultoria* (*Desultory Moments*, 1644), then two shorter works in Dutch; the Dutch poems would eventually be collected in *Cornflowers* (*Korenbloemen*, 1658). If these titles suggested that for Huygens literature

was little more than a distraction from his official duties as a diplomat and civil servant, they were also evidence of his consummate self-fashioning.

While Huygens possessed expertise in diverse fields and maintained a vast international correspondence, much of his poetry was concerned with private matters. The small collection *Holy Days* (*Heilighe daghen*, 1645), for instance, just nine sonnets, all of them written around New Year 1645, spoke of the poet's intense religious faith. Every poem stacked up paradoxes and articulated complex emotions of vulnerability and Calvinist guilt in poignant, punning language. If Jacob Cats rehearsed common values in repetitive verse, Huygens packed the highly personal in the fewest possible words.

The preference for direct and sometimes ironic observation of day-to-day scenes and private pursuits was also typical of Jan Six van Chandelier, a learned merchant. The seemingly unpretentious but carefully contrived realism of his poems, collected simply as *Poetry* (*Poezy*, 1657), could also be seen as contrasting with Vondel's highly strung pathos. Six appears to have moved outside the literary networks of the time, and his work went largely unnoticed until the late twentieth century. Even more down-to-earth was Willem Godschalck van Focquenbroch, whose talent lay in parody and burlesque; his first collection, *Thalia* (1665), named after the muse of comedy, was dedicated to a monkey. His nihilistic humour was appreciated mostly by younger audiences at the time, dismissed as coarse in the eighteenth century, and rediscovered only after the Second World War. More conventional perhaps, but also concerned with everyday topics, were the poetic exchanges between Catharina Questiers and Cornelia van der Veer. Their collection *Laurel Contest* (*Lauwer-stryt*, 1665) contained contributions by various authors from their social circle, but at its heart was a series of interconnected poems and responses in which each woman insisted the other accept the laurel crown. Typically, most of the other verses by these two women appeared dispersed over collective volumes.

1670–1700: The Neo-Classical Moment

Shortly after the publication of *Laurel Contest*, Catharina Questiers married and gave up writing. Ten years earlier she had put to rhyme prose versions of two Spanish plays, which were staged in the Amsterdam

Theatre. Cornelia van der Veer later exchanged poems with another woman author, Katharina Lescaijje, who translated and adapted at least seven plays from French. The strong presence of adaptations of foreign, mostly Spanish and French plays indicated not only translation as a fit occupation for women with literary ambitions, it also characterized dramatic production in the latter part of the century.

Vondel's classicism had already been criticized by Jan Vos. Another critic was Thomas Asselijn, who, like Vos, declared himself unwilling to bow to theoretical rules and instead championed the unadorned portrayal of raw reality. His *Rise and Fall of Masaniello* (*Op- en ondergang van Mas Anjello*, 1668), about the popular revolt in Naples in 1647, was a play full of extreme rage and bloodshed.

But there were other changes afoot, which further – but from a very different angle – undermined the authority of the ancients who meant so much to Vondel. Lodewijk Meyer, who entertained a strong interest in language issues and rational philosophy, and who had read Descartes and befriended Spinoza, was aware of the re-interpretation of Aristotle which Pierre Corneille had published in Paris in his famous three discourses of 1660, and he wrote imitations of several of Corneille's plays. In 1669 Meyer became one of the founders of a select society that adopted as its motto 'Nil Volentibus Arduum' ('Nothing is hard for those with a will'). The society aimed to improve the quality of Dutch theatre by applying the principles of Corneille's French neo-classicism, which stressed orderliness, clarity, decorum, and verisimilitude. They regarded Vondel's classicism as a thing of the past and treated the sensationalism of writers such as Vos and Asselijn with contempt. Their preferred instruments were criticism and polemic.

The result was an extraordinary series of virulent exchanges in which the society discredited the work brought out by other playwrights by swiftly producing their own competing versions, accompanied by sneering introductions explaining in detail the changes that had been necessary to meet the required neo-classical standard. Translations made by others likewise led to counter-translations by the society. They shored up their own position in weekly meetings where individual members discoursed on theoretical aspects of drama; some forty of these treatises were later published (but not until 1765), the most extensive poetics of the period. By 1677, when the Amsterdam Theatre was re-opened after six years' closure, Nil Volentibus Arduum had won the day. They gained control of the Amsterdam Theatre, and their leading figure, Andries

Pels, issued two theoretical works in which he set out the principles of a drama that wanted to be decorous, edifying, and uncontroversial. They heralded a new aesthetic. Neo-classicism dominated the Amsterdam stage until well into the eighteenth century.

Notes

1. R. Ryckaert, *De Antwerpse spelen van 1561 naar de editie Silvius (Antwerpen 1562) uitgegeven met inleiding, annotaties en registers*, 2 vols., Ghent, 2011, vol. I, 39.
2. See also Chapter 7 of this book.
3. W. A. P. Smit, 'Het Nederlandse Renaissance-toneel als probleem en taak voor de literatuurhistorie', *Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen Afdeling Letterkunde* 27 (1964), 167–210.
4. E. K. Grootes, 'De bestudering van populaire literatuur uit de zeventiende eeuw', *Spektator* 12 (1982–3), 3–24.

Dutch Classicism in Europe

At first glance, the Golden Age and classicism would not seem to be an obvious pairing. Of all the art produced in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century, the works which are viewed as paeans to the everyday are the ones that generally receive the most attention. Biblical and mythological subjects are framed as domestic genre scenes or usurped by painted still lifes, landscapes, and seascapes. In contrast, classicism harks back to Greco-Roman antiquity and strives for simplicity and harmony, but also monumentality and grandeur. All of this is far removed from the daily life that in the Republic was so often immortalized in paint.*

The prevalence of everyday life in the art of the Golden Age should, however, be qualified. Greco-Roman antiquity was, in reality, an important influence within the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and often eclipsed the representation of daily life in painting, architecture, and the theatre. One of the most pre-eminent examples of classicism is the mid-century Huis ten Bosch, which was designed by Pieter Post as a retreat for Amalia van Solms, wife of the stadholder Frederick Henry (Figure 16.1).¹ Hailed both at home and abroad, the commission conferred a semi-regal aura upon the House of Orange. The English envoy Samuel Pepys claimed that the central space, known as the Orange Hall, was the most impressive painted room that he had ever seen. The chamber, which is shaped like a Greek cross with truncated arms,

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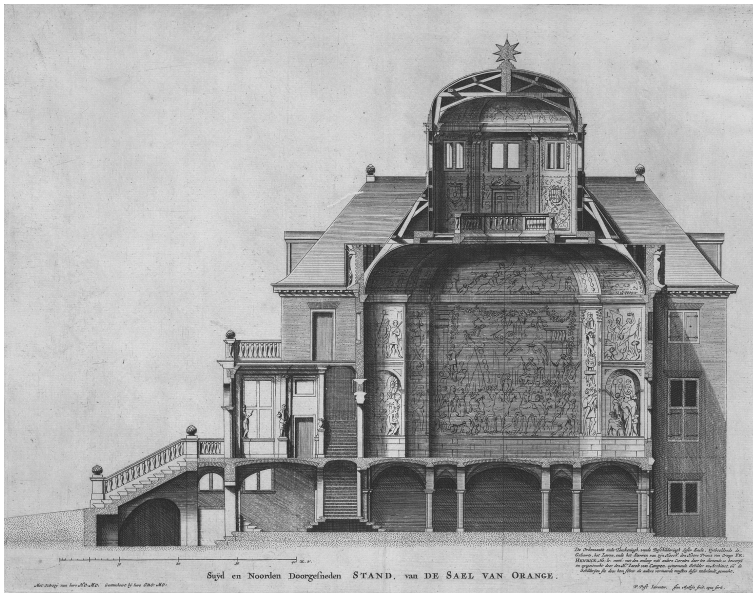


Figure 16.1 Jan Matthysz after Pieter Jansz Post, *Sectional View of Huis ten Bosch*, 1655.

betrays Post's interest in the work of Italian architects such as Palladio and Scamozzi who, in turn, worked from the Roman architectural treatise of Vitruvius.

The Orange Hall was dominated by thirty monumental paintings that, in their historical, allegorical, and mythological subjects, glorified the life of Frederick Henry. Pieter de Grebber, Gerard van Honthorst, and Salomon de Bray were among the painters commissioned (Figure 16.2). While some of these names might now seem obscure, especially when compared with Rembrandt, Vermeer, Steen, and Hals, they were all considered to be eminent artists in their day. Their works for the Orange Hall were simply framed and arranged to form a visual whole that left viewers under the impression that they shared time and space with the gods, heroes, and allegorical figures depicted on the surrounding walls.

However, the visitors were not urged to lose themselves entirely in the dream of being immersed in a distant past, since they had to relate the awe-inspiring hall to the Oranges from the recent past and the present. The hall had to make them fully aware that thanks to the



Figure 16.2 Gerard van Honthorst, *Amalia and Her Daughters*, Oranjezaal, 1650s.



Figure 16.3 Jacob Jordaens, *Frederick Henry as a Roman triumphator*, 1650s.

proficient and wise leadership of the Oranges the Republic enjoyed an economic and scientific as well as an artistic blooming comparable to the most prosperous periods in antiquity. Next to the Oranges, the city governments patronized art and architecture that referred to the Greco-Roman era serving a similar political agenda. Several magnificent buildings with large-scale paintings had to make manifest the florescence which the competent rulers had made possible.

Besides the political importance of referring to antiquity, the Orange Hall clarifies that in these grand undertakings a strict unified style was seldom at stake. Paintings that modern art historians would refer to as ‘classicist’ on the basis of their balanced compositions, vivid colours, and clarity of action were hung next to a ‘Baroque’ masterpiece by Jacob Jordaens that depicted Frederick Henry as a Roman *triumphator* (Figure 16.3). Unlike the majority of paintings in the room, this latter canvas is

characterized by an abundant use of colour, heterogeneous figures, and an intensely dynamic composition. The juxtaposition of such divergent works highlights one of the key issues surrounding the use of the terms 'classicist' and 'Baroque'. Indeed, in the seventeenth century very little differentiation was made between the two and, furthermore, both styles were simultaneously amalgamated into one grand and immersive environment. Within this, the aforementioned paintings could be apprehended as an immense *trompe-l'oeil*.

Modern scholarship, in the history of art as well as in the histories of architecture and the theatre in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, uses fixed criteria for the formal analysis of surviving artworks, buildings, and plays. In stark contrast to the Orange Hall and observers such as Pepys, it attempts to differentiate classicism from, among other things, the Baroque. The concept of classicism, therefore, is a modern invention as much as a historical phenomenon. As a result, different disciplines vary greatly in how they apply the term 'classicism'. Art historians, for example, begin with the paintings of Hendrik Golzius and end with Gerard Lairesse.² The classicist period therefore spans more than a century. Architectural historians limit themselves in time and space, however, and focus on the designs and buildings by Jacob van Campen and his circle, which date from the period between 1630 and 1680.³ They would define this as 'Dutch classicism'. Theatre historians, in turn, prefer the phrase 'French classicism' and home in on the last quarter of the seventeenth century – in other words, the era in which rigorous interpretations of Aristotle's and Horace's *Poetics* by French playwrights and theorists, such as Pierre Corneille and François Hedelin d'Aubignac, infiltrated the Republic through the literary society Nil Volentibus Arduum.⁴

Scholarship outside the Dutch realm has been marked in the past few decades by an ever increasing awareness that classicism can be approached as a broad intellectual movement that sought direction from the ancients in its search for a footing from which to discuss, evaluate, praise, or condemn art, architecture, and theatre.⁵ This search culminated in the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, which erupted in France, in 1687, and which centred on the issue of whether the achievements of the seventeenth century surpassed those of antiquity. *Modernes*, such as Charles Perrault, honoured Louis XIV by formulating a positive riposte to the question and, in so doing, propelled the king's magnificent artistic, theatrical, and architectural projects forwards; *anciens*, such

as Nicolas Boileau, took the opposite point of view. In later historical research, the *anciens* were therefore considered to be ‘classicists’. These were the figures who viewed the ancient past as being superior to their own epoch and revered the rules that had been passed down from antiquity. Recent scholarship, by contrast, has considered the *Querelle* itself to be ‘classicist’. The entire debate showcased the centrality of the classical world as a reference culture.

Parallel to the recent research into the *Querelle*, this chapter regards the seventeenth-century debates about art, architecture, and theatre in the Dutch Republic as ‘classicist’, since at the heart of these disputes lay the extent to which the ancients bequeathed appropriate measures by which to create and evaluate art. These debates were at least as numerous as in France and were the result of international exchange thanks to intense travelling and exchange of letters. They concentrate on topics as diverse as the creativity of dealing with classical orders (the distinctive proportions and designs in Greek and Roman architecture), the preference for imitation of the ancients over nature, and the usefulness of the ancient critique regarding the visualization and performance of violence. In the Dutch Republic this debate was extremely fierce even at the very start of the Golden Age.

The Republic and the Ancients

There were no ancient buildings to admire within the Dutch Republic and examples of classical sculpture were rare before the eighteenth century. Dutch architects and artists who wanted to imbibe the style of the ancients either relied on prints of antique buildings and sculptures or undertook cultural expeditions to the south. Parallel to, and partly in dialogue with, this artistic discovery of ancient aesthetics, a theoretical and philological debate ensued on how to understand and apply ancient norms and practices. Like other Europeans, the Dutch conducted intense debates about which of the ancient authors could act as an authority. The issue was not so much which of the ancients were most important in their own time (which is how we normally look at history), but how relevant they were to the new epoch. The question about antiquity’s right to exist in modern times was accompanied by another enquiry, one that upended the logical pattern of thought, as contemporaries asked: who among the moderns could match the ancients?

Here, it was a case of seventeenth-century architects, artists, and writers seeking to secure their legitimacy with the support of their classical forefathers.

In the early seventeenth century, classical authors were also used as an excuse to break with the art of the previous generation, such as the elaborately decorated buildings by Lieven de Key, the brightly coloured altarpieces and muscular figures painted by Cornelis van Haarlem, and the plays of the rhetoricians (*rederijkers*) that were riddled with complex allegories and plot twists. The younger generation reproached their predecessors for being overly preoccupied with superfluity in both word and image, which made it impossible to attain the correct proportions and clarity. These accusations triggered a renewal movement that, in addition to the *trompe-l'oeil* of the Orange Hall, also paved the way for, among other things, the Amsterdam Town Hall designed by Jacob van Campen and tragedies such as Vondel's *Lucifer*. At the same time, the reception of the ancient authors ensures that works that we never would deem to be classicist on the basis of a formal analysis – such as the bloodthirsty play *Aran and Titus* (1641) by Jan Vos or Rembrandt's strikingly realistic nudes – can be evaluated. On the basis of antique texts, these works were repeatedly condemned, but also fervently defended.

In addition to the question of which of the ancient texts were most relevant to modern times, there was the issue of how best to use them in the development of standards by which to create and evaluate art. This also applies even to the greatest masterpieces of the Golden Age, such as Vondel's tragedies, Rembrandt's paintings and etchings, and the architecture of Van Campen. In the seventeenth century, the query arose as to how competently artists such as Vondel, Rembrandt, and Van Campen treated, or even surpassed, the ancients. The answer was almost never unanimous: the correct application of the rules was open to debate, and as a result the regulations were far from definitive. Just as ancient texts were typically interpreted in a multitude of different ways, a wide range of ancient authors came to be cited as authorities.

Imitation or Denunciation

As early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, Erasmus encouraged people to read as many of the ancient authors as possible and, at the same time, cautioned against following them too literally. He pointed

out that it was necessary to adapt their work so that it could be put to the best possible use in the modern age. Erasmus launched a fierce attack on the so-called Ciceronians – a group of orthodox humanists who rigorously followed Cicero's language – for allowing Latin to become a dead language that was no longer suited to the expression of modern thought.⁶ To explain how the ancients ought to be followed, therefore, he provided a nuanced definition of the concept of *imitatio*.

The *imitatio* of Erasmus is anything but slavishly imitative. Those who were inspired by the ancient texts needed to always consider the degree to which the world had changed. Erasmus pointed out to his contemporaries that it was nigh on impossible to talk about the Christian faith in the language of Cicero, for the very simple reason that the Roman orator had died before the birth of Christ. If Cicero had lived in contemporary times, he would certainly have adapted his vocabulary. Such a vision of *imitatio* fell between two antithetical positions. At one extreme, there were those who consciously overlooked, or even completely excluded, the modern world in their orthodox imitation of the ancients. At the other end of the spectrum were those who possessed an unshakeable faith in the contemporary era.

While the Golden Age was marked by an incessant process of compromise between the two extremes, it is surprising to note how often a belief in the modern epoch was professed. Authors of all descriptions, such as Hugo Grotius, Constantijn Huygens, and Jan Vos, wrote that the present day surpassed antiquity because of the progress that had been made in building upon, and advancing, classical achievements. Modern inventions such as the lens, gunpowder, the compass, and the printing press provided ample corroboration. The popular playwright and theatre-maker Vos came under increasingly heavy criticism for only presenting bloody spectacles but, at the same time, his explicit reference to René Descartes in the preface to *Medea* reveals that he was acutely aware of contemporary science. Vos viewed Descartes as the harbinger of an entirely new era, and it pleased him to think that the latter was acquiring more acolytes than Aristotle.⁷ Nevertheless, rather than completely abandoning the ancient texts, Vos began to analyse them for their usefulness within the current context. The quest for their continued viability was driven by historicism and by Vos' awareness of the essential differences between antiquity and the present time.

Erasmus' nuanced interpretation of the concept of *imitatio* thus prepared the ground for the debates about the relationship between

antiquity and modernity that unfolded a century later in all their complexity. Another term that Erasmus addressed was the religious concept of the 'heretic'. The scholar revealed, with some derision, how the Ciceronians had appropriated the term 'heretic' and utilized it within a literary context to identify writers whose work deviated from the strict rules governing imitation.⁸ This behaviour particularly aggrieved the orthodox humanists who fired harsh salvos at those writers who refused to follow their conventions. The appropriation of the term 'heretic' thus enabled the formulation of general rules by which to roundly condemn all forms of aberration. While Erasmus mocked the Ciceronians for their use of the highly charged term, he also conceded that some considered the 'heretic' label to be a badge of honour. Those who did not wish to abide by the prevailing rules took pride in being thus stigmatized.

Classicism in Architecture

It is remarkable how often the term 'heretic' was used in the Netherlands. What started life as a deadly sobriquet used against the Protestants was soon commandeered by the Protestants themselves, and with just as many far-reaching consequences. It is therefore very surprising to note how, at the very dawn of the Golden Age, the term was appropriated and used in the discourse about art. Karel van Mander, for example, employed the word in his descriptions of various building practices. In his *Schilder-Boeck* of 1604, the father of Dutch art history described the newly completed Vleeshal (Meat Hall) by Lieven de Key in Haarlem as an indication of the 'serious heresy [that] has occurred in masonry, with a great frenzy of ornaments ... very disgusting to see' (Figure 16.4).⁹

Van Mander discusses De Key's 'heresy' within the context of the ancient architectural dictums and Italian building practices and, in so doing, arrives at a nuanced image of the correct form of *imitatio*.¹⁰ The Haarlem connoisseur also condemned De Key for his many variations of the ancient column orders and their fragmentation. He judged the ornate gables of the Vleeshal, which were covered in scrollwork and obelisks, to be an eyesore for being at too much a variance with the Greco-Roman model. By contrast, Van Mander paid homage to the style of Italian architecture that meticulously referenced, but did not



Figure 16.4 Anonymous, *View of Meat Market in Haarlem*, 1855.

slavishly imitate, classical buildings. He mentions Michelangelo immediately after Vitruvius, and states that the Italian was able to perfectly apply, and even successfully vary, the ancient orders:

In architecture beside the old common manner of the ancients and Vitruvius he [Michelangelo] has brought forth other new orders of cornices, capitals, bases, tabernacles, and other ornaments, wherefore all architects that follow after owe him thanks for his having freed

them from the old bonds and knots, and given them free rein, and licence to invent something besides the Antique.¹¹

Working half a century earlier than Van Mander, Pieter Coecke van Aelst introduced Vitruvius into Dutch culture through his translation of Sebastiano Serlio's treatise on architecture.¹² Long after Van Mander, the Italian guidelines continued to serve as the model of how Vitruvius' treatise could be used in modern construction practices, and they remained current throughout the entire seventeenth century. As the era progressed, however, increasing emphasis was placed upon ideal proportions. Scamozzi's *L'idea delle architettura universale* (1615), which had triumphed in clarifying the rules of harmony laid down by Vitruvius in *De Architectura*, was consequently considered to be an authority by Van Campen's circle. The treatise was founded upon the circle, square, and rectangle, with the ratios of 2:3, 3:4, 3:5, and 1:2. The practical application of the principles, however, was the subject of ongoing debate. Constantijn Huygens' home in The Hague (demolished in 1875) was a pre-eminent example of how the theory was put into practice.¹³

During his diplomatic travels on behalf of the House of Orange, Huygens had developed a passion for the villas and palaces built by Andrea Palladio in and around Venice, and also for the Queen's House and the Banqueting House designed by Inigo Jones in London. He was determined to familiarize his countrymen with the architectural power, simplicity, and splendour that could be derived from harmonious proportions and the ingenious application of the ancient orders. Huygens strove to fulfil this ambition by building his own house in the centre of The Hague, which he designed with his friend Jacob van Campen. It was an achievement of which Huygens must have felt proud, for he disseminated the plans as engravings (Figure 16.5). The print of the front façade reveals that a clean sweep was made of the lush decorations that De Key had deployed. In Huygens' design, there is no imaginative handling of the classical orders, nor stepped gables with scroll work and obelisks. The building relies, instead, upon the sparing use of antique pilasters, cornices, pediments, and garlands. It is precisely this simplicity that lends the façade a monumental appearance and ensures that the eye is drawn towards the three figures on the central pediment. The façade is adorned by sculptures representing Firmitas (Strength),

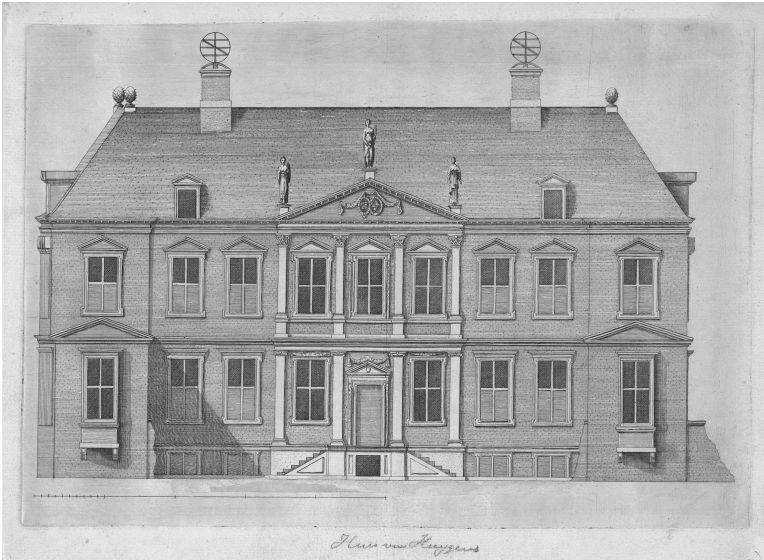


Figure 16.5 Theodor Matham, *Front Sight of the House of Constantijn Huygens*, 1639.

Utilitas (Utility), and Venustas (Beauty), the three principal architectural virtues as elaborated by Vitruvius.

Huygens, who sent copies of the engravings to the much-admired Inigo Jones, among others, wrote to a friend:

I have built a house, had prints made of it and will send them to you; Inigo Johns [*sic*] will see that his manner does not differ much from this one . . . Mr Inigo Jones will be able, if he pleases, to learn that the good Vitruvius is not totally excluded from Holland.¹⁴

We do not know whether Jones reacted to the engravings or had an opinion about the building. Not everyone, however, was convinced that Huygens' design had succeeded in importing Vitruvius to the Netherlands. It was Rubens, no less, who exhorted Huygens to think again. The Antwerp master wrote to Huygens that, while the design was indeed meritorious, it failed to reveal the proper application of the Vitruvian rules on proportion.¹⁵ If we stand before a seventeenth-century building today, one that betrays scrupulous proportions, obviously imitative antique column orders, and a lack of superfluous decoration,



Figure 16.6 Façade of the Riddarhuset, 1641–7.

we would immediately label it ‘classicist’. Yet Rubens’ reaction to Huygens’ home clearly indicates that in the seventeenth century, the label ‘classical’ was not given lightly and was ever subject to negotiation.

Despite Rubens’ qualms, Huygens’ interpretation of Vitruvius in the following decades led to the establishment of ‘Dutch classicism’. One of its most impressive examples is the Amsterdam Town Hall by Jacob van Campen (Figure 12.2). The building’s fame was bolstered by the many visitors who extolled its harmonious and majestic appearance, and the countless paintings and prints that served to emphasize the grandeur of the edifice. An impressive number of eulogies further augmented the allure of the building within the Dutch Republic. Dozens of seventeenth-century writers, including Huygens, Vondel, and Vos, took the Town Hall as a subject and were rewarded for their efforts by the city mayors.¹⁶ Never before had so many poems – either during or immediately after construction – been written about a building. Most of the panegyrists also argued, therefore, that the Amsterdam Town Hall triumphed over the ancient architectural traditions, and repeatedly referred to it as the eighth Wonder of the World. The seven ancient buildings and colossal sculptures – which had long since disappeared or were no longer observable – were anything but; instead they were manifestations of an ancient theory that claimed the overwhelming effect as the ultimate goal.

Thanks to, among other buildings, the Amsterdam Town Hall, Dutch architecture became more and more influential throughout northern Europe as the seventeenth century advanced. The spread of ‘Dutch classicism’ was accomplished by travellers, through illustrations of representative examples, and also by Dutch architects who worked on

commission in other lands.¹⁷ Justus Vingboons, for example, was invited to Stockholm in 1653 for the construction of the parliament, the Riddarhuset (Figure 16.6). For this commission he relied upon the rejected design that his brother, Philips, had made for the Amsterdam Town Hall and which had been issued as prints. Again, the pilasters dominate the façade of the imposing building, and the decoration is limited to garlands and three figures on the central pediment. In addition to the Riddarhuset, countless other governmental buildings, houses, villas, and palaces in northern and eastern Europe were designed by architects from the Dutch Republic or were inspired by their designs. Across the Baltic, in Sweden, Brandenburg, and the Polish–Lithuanian kingdom, Dutch classicist architecture was imitated to the extent that entire Dutch-looking streets and neighbourhoods emerged. Even in England, the work of Dutch architects and the proliferation of architectural prints substantially increased the impact of Scamozzi and Jones after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Disparaged by Rubens, Huygens' interpretation of the classics had, after all, been elevated to a European trademark.

Classicism in Drama and Theatre

While the application of classical theory fuelled debate within the context of seventeenth-century architecture, the authority of Vitruvius was more or less fixed. This was not the case in the theatre, where more classical authorities and models were available, whose validity and relative worth was questioned. Moreover, we can speak of a real clash between theory and practice. The ancient authoritative texts of Aristotle and Horace, in themselves hardly unambiguous, were soon challenged by English and Spanish theatrical practices and theories, which travelled to the Dutch Republic. Referencing Philip Sidney and Félix Lope de Vega, Theodore Rodenburgh applied English and Spanish theatrical theory as early as 1619.¹⁸ The ancient poetics encountered at least as much resistance from the makers of Senecan horror pieces, among others Jan Vos and later Thomas Asselijn. The discussions about the importance of Aristotle and Horace versus Seneca also had a direct impact upon parallel discussions within the context of the visual arts.

Theatre historians have paid a great deal of attention to the introduction of the French classicist rules by the members of the *Nil Volentibus Arduum* society, which was founded in 1669.¹⁹ The circle has been repeatedly credited with the importation of French theatre theory and practice into the Republic, most notably Pierre Corneille's requirement for unity of time, place, and action in the tragic plot, as well as the concepts of *vraisemblance* (credibility) and *bienséance* (propriety). The importance of Nil should be qualified on two important counts, however. Firstly, the Aristotelian and Horacian rules which Corneille applied had been known in the Republic from the early seventeenth century, long before the foundation of Nil. Secondly, the influence of Nil's classicism was limited to a relatively small section of the Dutch theatrical world; an important part of theatrical practice simply ignored the ancient rules and their French classicist interpretation until the end of the seventeenth century, despite the frantic efforts of the society.

The development of rules based upon the work of Aristotle and Horace followed a tortuous path. The French theorists and playwrights who were so influential in the second half of the century had themselves been deeply influenced by Dutch humanists such as Daniel Heinsius and Gerardus Vossius and their interpretation of the ancient poetics, especially those of Aristotle. Heinsius' *De constitutione tragoediae* of 1611 rapidly gained a reputation in northern Europe as the synthesis of the study on Aristotle's poetics. Heinsius influenced, among others, the French theatre theorists Chapelain and La Mesnardière who, from their position within the Académie française, gave form to French classicist drama. The two main proponents of French classicism, Corneille and Racine, were also heavily influenced by Heinsius. Corneille mentions the Dutch writer in the preface of *Menteur* (1644) as follows: 'the celebrated Heinsius who not only translated Aristotle's *Poetics* but also wrote a treatise on the constitution of tragedy'. Likewise, the international influence of Vossius' *Poeticae Institutiones* of 1647 on the foundations of French classicism should not be underestimated.

Heinsius and Vossius not only influenced French theatre practices but also had important links with the pre-1669 Dutch theatre world. Vondel, for example, began using the poetics of Heinsius and Vossius in the application of the Aristotelian and Horacian dramatic rules at the beginning of the 1640s. A meticulously conceived plot structure became increasingly important to the dramatist, and his experimentation with

this aspect of the play is clearly articulated in *Jephtha* (1659). Here, Vondel makes his first explicit reference to unity of action while allowing the plot shift (*peripeteia*) and the protagonist's sudden insight into his or her situation (*agnitio*) to shine as the crown jewels of the tragedy. Furthermore, Vondel also follows Horace as a guide to ensuring credibility (or what is known in French theatre theory as *verisimilitude*). He does not kill Jephtha's daughter before the eyes of the audience because, to use his own words, it was an impossible feat that lacked plausibility. A decade later, the argument concerning credibility was still current, and was further fuelled by Nil's advancement of the notion of propriety (*bienscéance*) as part of its explicit prohibition of violence within theatrical performances.

While the introduction of Aristotelian and Horatian rules for dramatic texts is therefore difficult to separate out from the theatrical performance itself, it is a mistake to assume that the visual aspect of the presentation became increasingly less important as the century progressed. Vondel was particularly committed to optimizing the impact of the performance and regularly worked with Jan Vos.²⁰ As head of the Amsterdam Theatre, the latter attempted to augment the power of Vondel's tragedies by including *tableaux vivants* and dances, among other things. Despite the efforts dedicated to making these plays a success, however, the Aristotelian and Horatian restrictions weighed heavily and, over time, the titles slipped out of the repertoire. Spectacular theatre in the tradition of Seneca, Lope de Vega, and Calderón, but also the Italian and French *pièces à machines*, won the day. To accommodate such productions, the Amsterdam Theatre was completely rebuilt in 1667, with Vos confidently asserting: 'The seeing comes before the saying.'²¹

In his preface to *Aran and Titus* (1641), the most successful theatre performance of the Golden Age, Vos highlighted the correspondences between his own work and the tragedies of Vondel.²² The relationship of his gory spectacle to the plays of the latter is one of symbiosis. Whereas the tragedies of Vondel showcase the inherent goodness in mankind, Vos reveals the fundamental weakness of humanity, and the shadowy dimension filled with cruelty and egotism. It is clear that Vos does not consider the two perspectives to be mutually exclusive. However, instead of the dramatic theories derived from Aristotle or Horace, Vos gravitated towards the work of Seneca. In the foreword that he wrote for his *Medea* (1667), he vigorously defends his choice and compares himself

with none other than Phaethon.²³ Just as the mythological boy challenges Apollo, Vos dares to surpass Aristotle and Horace by calling them into question, although he does not suffer Phaethon's fatal fall.

Vos, in his own words, could avoid ruination only by remaining resolutely within the here and now and by assessing every rule prescribed by the ancients for its usefulness within contemporary theatrical practice. Nowhere else is the *imitatio* of antique theory so sharply questioned in the Dutch Golden Age. Vos did not so much sweep the rules of Aristotle and Horace from the table, but rather subjected them to intense scrutiny. Thus Vos counters Horace's requirement for credibility



Figure 16.7 Rembrandt, *Female Nude, Sitting on a Platform*, 1629–33.

through historicization. The playwright upholds the rule of credibility because he believes that his audiences also need to be convinced of the dramatic scenes that unfold before their eyes – an essential requirement if they are to be swept away by the action. Yet Horace's conclusion that violence should not be portrayed, however, is seen as being applicable only to antiquity, the grounds for this being that Roman audiences would have been slow to accept the veracity of staged violence on account of their constant exposure to the savagery of the amphitheatres. The fact that the Dutch public was unfamiliar with the performance of a similar type of violence, and the ingenious illusions that could be quickly achieved in the new Amsterdam Theatre, were just two of the reasons why the public clamoured, according to Vos, to see his Medea hurl her children to earth from her flying chariot.

Whereas Vos and Vondel were mutually respectful of each other's work and occasionally collaborated, the gulf between the proponents of the strict application of the Aristotelian and Horacian rules and those who championed the spectacles inspired by Seneca widened ever further during the subsequent generation. The battle was fought on a knife edge, but often within the same parameters. Both sides accused the other of the self-same behaviour: slavish imitation. Members of Nil Volentibus Arduum referred to one of their most ardent opponents, Thomas Asselijn, whose plays required gory performances on stage, as an ape of Jan Vos. Asselijn, in turn, likened the members to infants who clung to chairs and benches in order to toddle a few steps. The word 'heretic' swung back and forth like a pendulum. It was Asselijn who used it as a nickname for his own performances when comparing members of Nil with the Inquisition: 'or a slavish probe of Art; wherein everything (which does not correspond with the canon or the rule of the Concilium) is seen as a heresy and rejected'.²⁴

Rembrandt

Seventeenth-century thinking on the correct application of ancient rules did not necessarily confine itself to a single art form. Nil Volentibus Arduum, for example, did not limit its critiques to the theatre: it criticized Rembrandt's oeuvre in the same terms as Asselijn's drama. In *Gebruik én misbruik des tooneels* (*Use and Misuse of the Theatre*, 1681), a plea for French classicism in the theatre, leading

member of Nil, Andries Pels, offered Rembrandt's nudes up for discussion. Pels considered Rembrandt to be the first heretic within the field of painting.²⁵ Rembrandt is known as a master at depicting postures and in the use of colour, but also as someone who took his lead from nature and observed it meticulously, as his unashamed nudes make clear (Figure 16.7):

Whenever he would paint a nude, as sometimes happened,
He did not choose a Greek Venus as his model;
But rather a laundress, or a turf stamper from a shed,
Calling his aberrance imitation of Nature.

Here we see actual works of art from antiquity being used to reinforce the ancient theory. Pels acknowledges the *imitatio* of antique examples – the sculptures of Venus – and weighs these against the painting of an ordinary woman. He condemns the fact that Rembrandt simply picks his subjects from everyday life, which he strives to render as faithfully as possible. For this condemnation he explicitly refers to the Horacian and French classicist rules of propriety. The poetic term used to criticize the atrocities and depravities within the theatrical world is now used in a discourse about art (in doing so, Pels was echoing Van Mander, who had also argued against the overtly faithful representation of nature as early as 1604 in his criticism of Caravaggio).²⁶ Pels portrayed Rembrandt as an innovator and, to ensure that this would be properly understood as blame rather than praise, he used the expression 'first heretic'.

In his scathing attack on Rembrandt, Pels also attacked the artist's supporters, such as Samuel van Hoogstraten. In his writings on art, this pupil of Rembrandt broke with the paintings and prints of, among others, Golzius and Cornelis van Haarlem (which were later grouped under the heading of 'Haarlem Mannerism') and opted to honour the painterly technique of his master. Van Hoogstraten warns against the overly free invention of the Haarlem artists and condemns depictions that rely too heavily upon the idealizing eye of the painter and too little upon the observation of nature.²⁷ This leads him, ultimately, to argue that it is far better to imitate nature than the work of the ancients. Once again, the term 'heretic' is invoked: 'Even following the ancients has brought some to heresy.'²⁸ Van Hoogstraten does, however, believe that artists could nevertheless follow their antique counterparts without falling prey to heresy. To support his argument, he refers to the Greek artist Amphiaraos who painted horses covered in dust and sweat: 'which

slightly diminished their beauty but nevertheless gave them a greater appearance of truth'.²⁹

It is precisely this conviction, according to Erik Jan Sluiter, that may have encouraged Rembrandt's determination to paint such realistic nudes.³⁰ The master does not deviate from antiquity; he simply chooses to ignore the Horatian concept of decorum, or decency. Instead, he decides to follow an alternative ancient dictum, namely that which elevates realism over ideal beauty. Thus Rembrandt was pitched against his Italian counterparts, such as Raphael, and Dutch colleagues, such as Golzius, who believed in idealism. Rembrandt deliberately took an alternative path, therefore, and selected his own ancient authorities. The artistic revolution that he triggered – dramatic as it was – can therefore be interpreted from the etymological origin of the word, namely *revolvere*, which means 'return'. Rembrandt thus looks backwards in order to innovate and securely anchors his radical decision in the depths of history.

Conclusion

On the basis of seventeenth-century debates, this chapter has shown that classicism within the Dutch Republic was Janus-headed. The concept of being 'classical' was shaped by constant negotiation over the way in which retrospection might lead to progress. No matter how impatient some of the progressive interlocutors revealed themselves to be during such deliberations, they all tended to believe that retrospection was invariably productive. Architecture, art, and theatre remained, therefore, firmly tethered to ancient theory. Today, such an historically oriented view of the future is difficult to grasp. We are profoundly influenced by a belief in progress that regards the past as a permanently closed chapter. This stance originated in the Enlightenment and was widely disseminated during the French Revolution. During this period, neo-classicism was revered throughout Europe. Despite the influence of classicism on neo-classicism, there is a substantive difference between the two movements. This stems not only from the changing sense of historicity but also from the fact that the appropriation of the ancients was anathema to neo-classicists. While seventeenth-century artists sought a means by which to enable the ancients to advance into their own time, neo-classicism was characterized by a sense of irrevocable

loss. This precluded appropriation, and it was only possible to reference, and this in the most literal way, antiquity. The Janus head that had been so fiercely determined by classicism was, at that moment, lost forever.

Notes

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3. K. Ottenheym, 'Proportional Design Systems in Seventeenth-Century Holland', *Architectural Histories* 2 (2014), 1–14.
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5. M. Fumaroli, 'Les abeilles et les araignées', in A.-M. Lecoq (ed.), *La Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, Paris, 2001, 7–218.
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7. J. Vos, 'Aan de beminnaars van d'oude en nieuwe tooneelspeelen', in J. Vos, *Alle de gedichten*, Amsterdam, 1662, C4r.
8. B. I. Knott, 'Introductory Note', in Desiderius Erasmus, *Dialogus Ciceronianus*, Toronto, 1986, 324.
9. K. van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, Haarlem, 1604, fol. 168v. Translation is mine.
10. K. Fremantle, *The Baroque Town Hall of Amsterdam*, Utrecht, 1957, 88–9; and K. Ottenheym, 'De schilder-architecten van het Hollands classicisme', in Blankert (ed.), *Hollands classicisme*, 39.
11. Van Mander, *Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 168v.
12. H. De la Fontaine Verwey, *Pieter Coecke van Aelst en de uitgaven van Serlio's architectuurboek*, The Hague, 1954.
13. K. Ottenheym, *Schoonheid op maat. Vincenzo Scamozzi en de architectuur van de Gouden Eeuw*, Amsterdam, 2010, 6–10 and 61–106; K. Ottenheym, 'Architectuur', in J. Huiskens, K. Ottenheym, and G. Schwartz (eds.), *Jacob van Campen. Het klassieke ideaal in de Gouden Eeuw*, Amsterdam, 1995, 157.
14. Quoted in G. Worsley, *Inigo Jones and the European Classicist Tradition*, New Haven, 2007, 52.
15. Worsley, Inigo Jones, 55; and K. Ottenheym, 'La vera simmetria conforme le regole degli antichi. Rubens and Huygens on Vitruvius', in K. Ottenheym and K. De Jonge (eds.), *Unity and Discontinuity: Architectural Relations Between the Southern and Northern Low Countries, 1530–1700*, Turnhout, 2007, 137–61.
16. S. Bussels, 'Meer te verwonderen, als immer te doorgronden. Het Amsterdamse stadhuis, een overweldigende burgerspiegel', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 126 (2013), 234–48.
17. Ottenheym, *Schoonheid op maat*, epilogue; and W. Kuyper, *Dutch Classicist Architecture: A Survey of Dutch Architecture, Gardens and Anglo-Dutch Architectural Relations from 1625 to 1700*, Delft, 1980.

18. T. Vergeer and O. van Marion, 'Spain's Dramatic Conquest of the Dutch Republic: Rodenburgh as a Literary Mediator of Spanish Theatre', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 32 (2016), 40–60.
19. Gelderblom, 'Een verjongend corset'.
20. S. Bussels, 'Vondel's *Brothers* and the Power of Imagination', *Comparative Drama* 49 (2015), 49–68.
21. Vos, 'Aan de beminnaars', C3r.
22. Vos, '[Dedication to Joan Huydecoper]', in *Alle de gedichten*, A3r–v.
23. Vos, 'Aan de beminnaars', C2v–A2r.
24. '[Ofte een slaafachtige onderzoeking der Kunst; waar by alles, (wat niet met den kanon ofte reegle van dat Concilium over een komt,) werdt verkettert, ende verworpen': N.N. [Thomas Asselijn], 'Voorbericht tegens de Dichtkunstige Onderzoekers', Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen (KNAW) G1148 Band 64, fol. 2r, quoted in Marijke Meijer Drees, 'De treurspelen van Thomas Asselijn (ca. 1620–1701)', PhD dissertation Utrecht University, 130. Translation is mine.
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26. E. J. Sluijter, 'Rembrandt and the Rules of Art Revisited', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museum* 51 (2009), 123–4.
27. T. Weststeijn, *The Visible World: Samuel van Hoogstraten's Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting*, Amsterdam, 2008, 126.
28. '[Z]elf d'Antijken te volgen heeft sommige in kettery gebracht': S. van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst*, Rotterdam, 1678, 18.
29. '[T] welk of het hen wel iets van de schoonheit benam, nochtans een te grooter schijn van waarheyt gaf': Van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding*, 168. Translation is mine.
30. Sluijter, 'Rembrandt', 121–9.

Part VII

Realms of Knowledge

Education

In 1603, Europe's most famous scholar, Joseph Scaliger, observed that 'In the Netherlands, peasant women and men, and almost all maid servants, are able to read and write.'¹ The high rates of literacy struck many visitors in the period, and are repeated and confirmed by historians even today: the Dutch Republic is likely to have been the most literate society of seventeenth-century Europe.² The reasons have been sought in a variety of circumstances: a confluence of religious, economic, social, and cultural factors created a fruitful market for the printing presses. Protestantism's emphasis on individual reading of the Bible was generally conducive to passive reading. It was in particular in the context of the further confessionalization of Dutch society after the Synod of Dordt (1618–19) that the Reformed Church put extra emphasis on vernacular understanding of the biblical text. But this religious context alone fails to account for the literacy rates. Scaliger's observation dates from the beginning of the seventeenth century, before the Synod of Dordt and before the plans to further reform society.

Equally conducive to Dutch literacy was the flourishing economy. Businesses needed people versed in double-entry bookkeeping and commercial correspondence. The maritime economy also required a well-trained workforce of navigators, and the open character of Dutch society created a market for language tuition and translation. Social reasons stimulated literacy as well: the peculiar corporational fabric of society led to what Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies called a 'discussion culture'. Manifested through frequent meetings on all levels of society, in church and state bureaucracies, translated into much administration and a vast system of bureaucracy, the discussion culture relied on an extensive written archive.

Scaliger's observation prompts the question of how lower-class men and women learned to read and write. The answer can be found to a large extent in the infrastructures created by the urbanized and corporative society. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, a relatively well-functioning system of primary and secondary education was in place that catered to the sons and daughters of labourers, skilled artisans, small-time merchants, and sailors. With ninety-two Latin Schools, six Illustrious Schools, and five universities, the Dutch Republic likely had Europe's densest network of classical humanist education. The solid infrastructure of large numbers of schools offering primary, secondary, and tertiary education was the foundation of both Dutch prosperity and the fame of the United Provinces as a centre of learning. But, just as elsewhere in Europe, many children continued to receive at least part of their education outside these schools.

Hands-On Training

Teenagers trained for a craft in the guilds or at workplaces, often on the basis of a contract that stated both parties' duties. One salient type of vocational training was surgery. In the seventeenth century, the world of the surgeons and that of the theoretically trained academic physicians started to converge; clinical teaching was introduced at some universities in the Dutch Republic. Increasingly, university students were acquainted with surgery through anatomical lessons. Leiden University boasted the first anatomical theatre in northern Europe (1596); in Rotterdam the surgeon's guild opened a dissecting room in 1642. Such rooms were called 'theatres'. The word 'theatre' not only derived from the Greek simply as a place to look at things; it also had overtones of a dramatic spectacle. The collective beholding of death took place in an atmosphere of contemplation. The interiors of Reformed churches might have looked rather plain, but the interiors of anatomical theatres were lavishly decorated with prepared skeletons as emblems of the transience of the earthly life. The anatomist not only cut, but while doing so he also reported aloud on what he was doing. The combination of the spoken word, the observed phenomena, the emblematic environment, and the strict rules of conduct all worked together to give the occasion the sense of an awesome theatre in which the holy Book of Nature was explained.

Another famous guild, ardently studied today, was that of the painters. Due to the scarcity of rich aristocratic maecenases, because of Protestant iconoclasm, and despite the modern fame of some Golden Age painters as highly individual artists, seventeenth-century Dutch painters largely trained for a bourgeois market centred in the cities of the powerful province of Holland. Drawing was not introduced into the curricula of secondary educational institutes until the eighteenth century, so in the seventeenth century instruction in drawing and painting was organized by the guilds, where students trained for about three or four years. At Amsterdam's St Lucas Guild, students as old as twenty were permitted to start their training. As in other guilds, the trajectories show great variations, depending on the individual ways in which masters treated their disciples. It is still a matter of debate to what extent famous theoretical books such as Karel van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck* (1604), which treated techniques such as shadow and perspective, were actually used in the curriculum. Samuel van Hoogstraeten's self-professed reason for publishing his now well-studied *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst* (1678) was the lack of proper education:

Real painters have usually been made by chance, and how? The youth is brought to some painter or other, or whoever calls himself such, to learn superficial drawing, making figure after figure. Having gained some dexterity in this, they take a paintbrush, and are thus after some time regarded as masters by ignorant people, even before they themselves learn what the art of painting is about.³

The urban landscape was also responsible for the relatively good education of destitute children. Cities were proud of their conspicuous orphanages. These often sent their flock from the age of six onwards to work in the textile industry, carpeting, masonry, shoemaking, or bookbinding. In some cases, orphanages ran their own teaching schemes on the premises. Girls trained as seamstresses or milliners.

Reading and Writing for Boys and Girls

The high rates of literacy do not necessarily imply creativity and independence. On the contrary, knowing how to read and write was a means to a higher goal: to learn the catechism and read the Bible. Children had to be trained, not educated; they were expected to answer, not to question, to reproduce and not to express individuality. The expression of emotions

followed established rhetorical or poetical models. The importance of laymen being able to study the Bible was stimulated by Protestantism, but it had a pre-Reformation history.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the cities had largely taken over the medieval parish and cathedral schools. They turned the schools into municipal 'Great Schools' and founded many such schools from scratch, offering primary and secondary education to boys from six to eighteen years old and to young girls. Prepared by the education reform of the Brethren of the Common Life in the fourteenth century and inspired by the rise of humanism north of the Alps from the late fifteenth century onwards, sixteenth-century city magistrates and pedagogues put great emphasis on the study of Latin, although most of the teaching at the Great Schools was in Dutch. The elder children took an active part in educating the younger ones. The great schools offered top classes in Latin for boys aspiring to attend university, which was only for about 10 or 20 per cent of the hundred-odd students typically attending these Great Schools. The power of the cities in the sixteenth century had made possible a prosperous educational market. Yet, tiny villages in the countryside usually also had schools. All of these developments took place under what was still Catholic rule.

It was only during the early phases of the Dutch Revolt that the Dutch Schools became the place for the teaching of Protestant thought, to boys as well as to girls. They were monitored by the ecclesiastical and secular authorities, at the municipal and provincial levels, but they were paid for by the magistracy. Schoolmasters earned additional incomes by charging school fees. Not all families could afford the 6 or 7 guilders required to have their child learn to read and write. To keep poor children off the streets, cities often paid Dutch schoolmasters extra if they took poor children to board. In Utrecht, poor children were sent to the so-called parish schools, which were attached to the municipal churches. Poor children required special treatment, though, for many of them had to work from a young age onwards. The seventeenth century witnessed an increase in special schools for destitute children. The curriculum revolved around inculcating into children a Reformed Protestant morality, and the schools contributed to the Reformed confessionalization of the country, in particular in the period directly after the Synod of Dordt.

First of all, children needed to be able to understand the Bible. One way was for children to learn by heart proverbs based on biblical verses,

prayers, and the Ten Commandments. But for the ability to always take to heart the teachings of the Bible, one had to learn how to read. Reading preceded writing; from spelling books such as the much-used *Rooster Book* (*Haneboek*), children learned letters and how letters formed words. It was difficult enough to recognize the shape of letters, since children had to learn upper-case and lower-case in both Gothic and roman types. Children first trained a couple of years in reading before turning to writing. One of the reasons for this procedure might have been that it made no sense to have children under the age of about nine or ten waste costly paper, pens, and ink due to a limited control over their finger movements. Reading was intensive, not extensive.

Catechism was the second major part of the teaching programme. In the first half of the century the focus was on the Heidelberg Catechism, in particular after the Synod of Dordt. In the second half of the seventeenth century, a special children's catechism gained ground. Learning the catechism by heart required much repetition. Repetition was not practised collectively. A school existed usually of only one room, in which children of different ages and levels worked side by side. They formed small groups or studied individually. A couple of times a day they would be individually questioned by the teacher, who sat prominently on a chair on a small platform or behind a desk in the room, and before whom children queued up to be tested.

Not all teaching, however, was individual or semi-individual, as is clear from a third important part of the curriculum: the studying of the psalms on Saturday in preparation for the church service on Sunday. This was done collectively by all children in the room. The singing of psalms was part of a larger educational programme aimed at instruction on how to behave in a disciplined manner during service as an exemplary member of the Reformed Church. That function was all the more important because the Reformed children formed a minority in the pluriform confessional landscape of the Dutch Republic. In fact, the public Dutch Schools were only part of a larger education sector.

Apart from these official schools, there was a busy market of commercial 'additional' or 'adjunct' schools (*bijsscholen*): private schools that were completely independent. Private teachers who ran such schools offered courses in French, arithmetic, bookkeeping, and navigation, often specializing in one of these, or tailoring specifically to girls. Depending on the costs, some of them were more specialized and efficient. Some of them were run by women and focused on learning

how to write. Women often ran nursery schools, looking after children of working mothers and perhaps teaching them some basic reading.

Some teachers at Dutch Schools taught the elder children basic mathematics, but usually instruction on how to add, subtract, divide, and multiply was given only on request and could be learned more fruitfully from a teacher who specialized in teaching numeracy. The most frequently used book on the subject was Willem Bartjens' *Quantifying: Holding the Basic Rules of the Art of Arithmetic*, published in 1604 and republished numerous times in the next two hundred years. Bartjens applied counting to specific systems of weights and currencies, providing countless exercises dealing with such things as compound interest, but he provided no algebra or geometry.

Another important specialization of the private education sector was navigation – a vital concern in the Dutch seagoing empire. In 1586, the self-acclaimed pioneer of education in seafaring, Robbert Robbertsz, started a private school in Amsterdam and found his own niche in the market, catering to adult students. The success of his school translated into a much-used schoolbook on the subject in 1612. The 'free market' and the lack of standards of private education in navigation led to fierce competition in the mid seventeenth century and to a flourishing market in printed instructions on seafaring, bridging the gap between new scientific insights and old seafaring practices. To survive, many private teachers also moonlighted as teachers of bookkeeping and surveying. From the 1620s onwards, public school teachers were increasingly capable of giving basic lessons in the art of navigation – a welcome supplementary income to their teachings. Near the end of the century, the market continued to expand. Of course, once at sea pupils – even after receiving instruction – still had much to learn in practice, as had always been the case.⁴

French Schools had existed since the beginning of the sixteenth century, frequently offering instruction not only in French conversation, but also in reading and writing, or even in arithmetic, calculation, double bookkeeping, and other subjects, usually on the parents' request. They rose to popularity after the first wave of southern migrants at the turn of the century: in the period 1570–1630 some 418 schoolmasters are recorded to have migrated from the Southern to the Northern Netherlands; not all of them were French teachers, but most of them who were came from Antwerp. The schoolbooks of the prolific Antwerp Protestant Pierre Heyns, for example, were extremely

successful, even before he relocated to Haarlem in 1595. Heyns catered to both boys and girls. He adopted the tradition at Latin Schools of writing plays for his boys and girls to stage. He dedicated an edition of one of his French plays to a former female star pupil.⁵

At the end of the seventeenth century, a second wave of French-speaking migrants reached the Republic. After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, most cities featured at least one French School, frequented by children of the Dutch elite. A well-known French schoolmaster in Amsterdam was Pierre Marin, who in the last decade of the seventeenth century started to publish two French grammars which were in popular demand. French Schools found a niche in the market by offering education for girls: before the 1630s girls attended schools dominated by boys, but after that girls-only schools opened. This tendency was reinforced by widows who took over the schools their husbands had formerly run (and in which they often had played a significant unofficial role anyway).

The frontispiece of one particular schoolbook of the French schoolmaster Caspar van den Ende gives evidence of mixed education (Figure 17.1). It depicts the interior of a school with thirteen boys and three girls, apparently all teenagers. Although a manual for schoolmasters of 1591 recommended that girls be separated from boys, here the sexes intermingle,⁶ suggesting regular and genteel conduct. To the right is the schoolmaster on a raised platform, holding up his paddle while hearing one of his students, or perhaps administering punishment. Another pupil waits her turn. At the other side of the room boys seated at a table consult one another over books. One of them points out a book page to a girl standing. An ink pot sits in the middle of the table. On the wall are suspended some of the elder pupils' schoolbags with writing utensils – a customary sight on seventeenth-century depictions of Dutch school interiors. The boys all sport hats, apart from the one who is being heard by the master. Engravings of Dutch schools that come from sources other than title pages of books (the latter usually acted as advertisements) often show younger children sitting on the floor and give more a chaotic impression than this orderly classroom.

The success of French was due to the rise of France as Europe's central power in the seventeenth century, which also dealt a significant blow to Latin as the elite's second language after Dutch. Even among the English and Germans, French was the court language *par excellence*.⁷ For getting to



Figure 17.1 Detail of the title page of *Le Gazophylace De la Langue Françoise et Flamende, dat is Schat-kamer der Nederduytsche en Francoysche Tale*, 1654.

grips with English and German, Dutch students were dependent on private teaching, although most people aspiring to learn these vernaculars did so for commercial reasons and probably picked up enough of the language along the way to conduct negotiations.

Next to French, Latin remained important. In the course of the sixteenth century, the Great Schools were institutionally separated into Dutch and Latin Schools. Even if Latin Schools struggled to find Protestant successors to Catholic rectors during the Dutch Revolt, it is remarkable that small towns with fewer than a thousand inhabitants maintained Latin Schools throughout the seventeenth century. Latin Schools, however small, imparted symbolic power, through the prestige of the classical curriculum and the social status this bestowed on the pupil. Latin Schools were frequented by the sons of the higher strata of society: regents, merchants, physicians, preachers, and government officials. Most of these boys moved on to universities, later to take their place in leading positions in society. Girls were excluded from Latin Schools, as they were from the universities – the famous case of Anna Maria van Schurman, who attended Professor Gisbertus Voetius' theological lectures in Utrecht in the 1630s sitting behind a curtain, constitutes the proverbial exception to the rule. Girls who learned Latin

did so through private tuition – as did many boys. A wide selection of private tutors was available, in particular in the cities.

A peculiar private initiative to provide instruction to the common man came from the Amsterdam physician Samuel Coster. In 1617, this Arminian-leaning playwright opened his so-called Dutch Academy, teaching mathematics, astronomy, navigation, history, Hebrew, philosophy, literature, and drama to adult citizens. The male burghers of Amsterdam were also to be taught how to dance, treat women, and speak in public. Two of the century's most famous Dutch playwrights, Hooft and Bredero, each had a play staged in the Academy. The Academy demonstrates the friction between innovative ideas and conservative powers: Coster's original method of having subjects taught by means of vernacular plays remained limited to a small number of stagings. His plan to provide public lectures in Dutch on academic subjects never took off: only during the first year did two teachers give instructions in arithmetic and Hebrew. The Synod of Dordt gave the final blow to all lessons. In 1622, Coster sold the Academy building, after the church council accused the Academy of harbouring Arminian and Mennonite sympathies. Despite its failure, Coster's initiative signifies that rhetoricians and playwrights appropriated educational roles and programmes.

A Multi-Confessional Landscape

Without the permission of the magistracy, no private person was allowed to run a Dutch, Latin, or French School. Although the secular authority usually had the final say in matters of dispute, the individual balance of power between the church council and the magistracy in each town determined how much control the church could exercise. In rural areas, many of the new Reformed teachers met with long-term hostility from a population which remained Catholic.

Near the end of the sixteenth century, only an estimated 10 per cent of the population were confirmed members of the Reformed Church, and it is unsurprising therefore that there were numerous private schools of other confessional bents. In Haarlem, Utrecht, and Nijmegen, Catholic communities or nobles were successful in keeping Catholic tuition afloat. The famous natural historian Anthonie Leeuwenhoek learned Latin in a more or less illegal Catholic boarding school in Warmond. Depending on their religious zeal, magistracies often permitted

Lutheran schools. After the Synod of Dordt, the supervision of the *bijsscholen* intensified, but that did not stop the city of Rotterdam in 1634 from appointing a Remonstrant as rector of its Latin School. In Haarlem in 1642 there were twenty-eight Baptist and eleven Catholic schoolmasters active, alongside the thirty-five schoolteachers employed by the city in the Dutch Schools and Latin School. In Amsterdam, Spinoza first went to the rabbinical school connected to the Portuguese synagogue, without ever making it to the higher classes. Later on, he attended the private school of the Catholic schoolmaster Franciscus van den Ende, where he learned Latin. He was older than his fellow pupils, and he might have paid his fees, in turn, by teaching Hebrew to others.⁸ A Jew could attend a Catholic school because there was no clear 'pillarization' of education: Jews, Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics could both attend Reformed schools and later enter the universities (although professors had to be of the Reformed faith). In places with large Catholic communities, Reformed teachers were softer on Reformed confessionalization, lest they alienate Catholic families and miss out on school fees. Catholic pupils could, for example, be exempted from learning the psalms for church services on Sunday, which they did not attend anyway. As we have seen in the case of Coster, education outside the schools was often associated with libertine teaching. Thus the headmaster of one of the two Amsterdam Latin Schools, Matthaeus Sladus the Younger, complained that competing private tutors upheld unorthodox religious ideas. This time, the Amsterdam city magistrates turned a deaf ear, according to the Amsterdam professor Gerard Vossius, because their own children learned more from private lessons than from the public lessons at the Latin School.⁹

Religious confession did not rule absolute in Dutch education because schools were not run by the church. However much pietistic authors of Reformed educational books such as Willem Teellinck and Jacobus Koelman might have wished it, Reformed schooling had no monopoly over education and the official schools were never really turned into pietistic learning grounds. The only type of teaching the Reformed Church controlled entirely was the Sunday school for the poorest boys and girls, who had no opportunity to attend a school because they needed to work all week to contribute to the family's small income. On Sundays, the local minister taught them prayers and the catechism and to read the Bible, as well as some writing. In some

places, the welfare organization of the public church ran its own schools throughout the week.

The limited power of the church is demonstrated by its inability to push confessional school regulations, known as *school-ordres*. The national synod of 1586 in The Hague designed such a programme, but it faltered. The provincial synod of Groningen drew up a programme in 1654, hoping in vain that the provincial states would endorse it. Secular school orders were more successful: in Utrecht, in 1654, a provincial school order was accepted, and a year later followed a school order for the Generality Lands. The latter aimed to reduce the number of private Catholic schools, but without much success; their number actually increased in the years following its introduction.

Institutions of Higher Education

Lured to Leiden in 1593 by the stick of looming religious persecution in France, and by the carrot of a princely salary with no obligation to teach, Joseph Scaliger spent his last and most productive sixteen years in Leiden. There, he did not simply complain about the miserable weather conditions, about his Dutch colleagues drinking too much, and about his fellow citizens urinating against the church after Sunday morning's service; he also took great care of a cherry-picked group of brilliant students and exploited the leading position of the Dutch printing houses. 'Leiden is a swamp amidst swamps, but its library is a great asset; students can actually study there,' his students quoted him as saying. 'Learning has been exiled everywhere, but it flourishes anew in this small corner of the world, Holland,' something for which Scaliger claimed credit: 'It is Leiden's marvel, such a pretty university. It was founded when the States [of Holland] had no money. Since the appointment of new professors at this university was arranged through favouritism and personal bonds, it declined. But I have been the reason why they sent professors like Everhardus Vorstius, Dominicus Baudius, Daniel Heinsius, and Lucas Trelcat the Younger to Leiden.'¹⁰ When Scaliger died in 1609, his *Legatum Scaligeranum* laid the foundations of the University Library's famous oriental collection. His study of oriental languages tremendously stimulated the rising importance of philology. His predecessor, the great Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius, had claimed to have made 'philosophy out of philology', but Scaliger

separated the two again: with him, philology rose to prominence as a field in its own right and was developed further by the next two generations. As such, his work was also the bedrock upon which critical historical thought could develop in the Republic, Britain, and elsewhere.¹¹

Since the rise in the 1930s of the idea that the seventeenth century witnessed a 'Scientific Revolution', historians of knowledge have focused primarily on certain theories and practices in philosophy and the natural sciences which were 'new' in the experience of seventeenth-century learned people. But seventeenth-century scholars invested at least as much energy in the pursuit of new techniques to study the human past: philology, historical criticism, and theories of language. At a time in which a broad Faculty of Arts prepared students for a study at one of the three 'higher' faculties of medicine, law, and theology, natural science continued to be very much embedded in a philosophical discourse, and philosophy was largely conducted in the context of the study of Greek and Roman antiquity. The Faculty of Arts was therefore also designated as a Faculty of Philosophy, or of Letters. The measure to which faculties were receptive to new philosophies differed widely. The development of knowledge in the seventeenth century should not be seen as a clash between Renaissance humanism and the New Science; instead it appears that the knowledge traditions at universities were pluriform and dynamic. There was not one type of Aristotelian philosophy, and the ideas of the French philosopher René Descartes, who lived and wrote in Holland, were received in creative ways inside and outside the universities.

The traditional universities sometimes suffered competition from a polymorph intermediate form: municipal Illustrious Schools or academic gymnasia. These educational institutions provided education on an academic level, although they did not have the right to grant degrees. Cementing a bridge between the Latin School and the university, they often guided students to universities eventually.

Illustrious Schools and universities mushroomed during the Dutch Revolt. The first university to be opened within the rebellious provinces was that of Leiden in 1575. From the start, the university met with rival agendas, some humanists advocating the study of rhetoric, poetry, and history, thought of as the prerequisites for cavalier governors. Calvinists, in contrast, thought of the university as primarily aimed at providing the country with properly trained Reformed ministers.

The university in fact provided both. The idea that a school was a 'seminar for state and church' featured in almost all the plans for founding Illustrious Schools and universities.¹²

Despite the failures to found institutions of higher education in places peripheral to the economic and political centre of Holland, such as Nijmegen, Middelburg, and Maastricht, the establishment of five new universities and eleven Illustrious Schools within less than a hundred years in such a small geographical space is remarkable. It signals the revolutionary changes in Dutch education as a result not only of the growth of the population, but also of their relative high literacy, even if only about 2 per cent of male adolescents actually attended university.

The European Appeal

The combination of the *libertas philosophandi*, the strong humanist tradition of classical and biblical philology, and advanced research infrastructure helped Leiden to fashion itself as a leading university in Europe. Throughout the long seventeenth century, students flocked to Dutch universities from all over Europe, in particular (but not exclusively) from Protestant territories. 'I am in Leiden, the metropolis of the Muses in Holland', the French scholar Samuel Sorbière exclaimed in 1660, 'The university still has more than three thousand students, who come hither from the far end of Poland.'¹³ In 1649, 44 per cent of all newly enrolled students were born outside the Dutch Republic. Most of the foreign students came from the German Empire, Calvinists and Lutherans alike. Over the period 1640–1740, some 986 Germans studied in Utrecht – three times as many as the combined number of English and Scottish students (325). Yet the attendance from across the Channel was hardly negligible. Nor was the attraction limited to the first half of the century: in Leiden, the number of Calvinist Scottish students tripled in the second half of the seventeenth century, pushed by the Restoration in Britain, and pulled by the Calvinist curricula and the possibility of learning French in Holland. Throughout the century, a Dutch education warranted fame, prestige, and tradition.¹⁴

The vibrant culture of learning at the universities facilitated, and was facilitated by, an economic and social knowledge infrastructure outside the schools. Amsterdam and Leiden were among Europe's main

publishing centres, in particular since so much French and Latin literature for the European market could be printed here with relatively few restrictions. The country's scholars were not only well integrated into the European learned correspondence network known as the Republic of Letters, but in fact constituted one of its main centres, together with Paris and London. Leiden, Utrecht, The Hague, and Amsterdam ranked as capital centres of this community of scholars and scientists, not just because of the cosmopolitan universities and access to printed books, but also on account of the excellent lines of communication. Philologists active in the Dutch Republic constituted the elite of the European Republic of Letters, and scholars vied to strike up epistolary contact with them.¹⁵ In the second half of the century, they were joined in their high reputations by philosophers such as Pierre Bayle, John Locke, and Thomas Hobbes, who all stayed for a prolonged period in the Dutch Republic precisely because it had established itself as a centre of learning in the first half of the century.

The Appeal of Literary Studies

The Illustrious Schools, like the Latin Schools, offered primarily propaedeutic teaching: deep into the eighteenth century, these academic gymnasia stood in a tradition of late humanist classical scholarship. The success of this type of school was largely due precisely to this somewhat conservative curriculum, on which the new sciences and the new philosophy had little grip. Even in the liberal city of Amsterdam, where Descartes was active, Cartesianism was introduced at the Illustrious School only after it had been normalized at Utrecht and Leiden Universities. Significantly, Pierre Bayle in 1693 had to abandon his chair as professor in Rotterdam on the accusation of spreading atheism.

The same level of conservatism is routinely ascribed to the universities: historians point out that the major innovations in science and philosophy took place outside the universities. When it comes to natural science, this seems to hold true for the first three quarters of the seventeenth century. But the attraction of the Dutch universities lay in other subjects: they ranked as powerhouses of international Calvinism and as the homes of some of Europe's most advanced scholars of historical criticism. Leiden University, principally, ranked as the most fashionable

European university, its professors of history and philology being celebrated across Protestant and Catholic Europe alike. In fact, it was precisely the great literary tradition of humanism, in particular its highly sophisticated biblical criticism, that earned the Dutch centres of learning their fame.¹⁶ When it comes to vernacular culture, it might be that 'the literature and poetry of the Republic met with little resonance abroad'.¹⁷ But that is to overlook the bilingual literary culture of the seventeenth century. Daniel Heinsius' Latin poems and theories, for example, had a profound influence on German vernacular poetry.¹⁸ In the case of the natural sciences, it has been stated that 'none of the famous Dutch scholars who made important contributions to international scientific developments were university professors'.¹⁹ But for a seventeenth-century student, philology and theology were perhaps more 'scientific' than medicine. All too often, historians still judge the Dutch Golden Age by anachronistic standards. To focus on Descartes, Spinoza, and radical thinkers, on Christiaan Huygens and Leeuwenhoek, is to ignore the enormous reputation which the Dutch philological school enjoyed in Europe. The historical and philological study, for instance, of the Bible and the church fathers conducted by professors at the arts faculties was felt to be highly urgent and relevant in the debates which raged not only between Catholics and Protestants, but also between different sects within Protestantism or even within Reformed Protestantism. Failing to acknowledge this is to project post-seventeenth-century evaluations of natural science and radicalism onto a culture that focused on reading and interpreting the Bible.

In this vibrant learned and literary culture, much of the education was not vocational or scientific, but moral. Daniel Heinsius, a professor of Greek and of history, custodian of Leiden's University Library, and a notorious alcoholic, not only attracted students from all over Germany due to his poetical theories in Latin, but was also popular because of his attachment to poetical production in the vernacular. When he (pseudonymously) published a hugely successful love emblem book in the vernacular in 1601, he not only tied into a European tradition which had developed different characters in different regions (in the Spanish empire, Counter-Reformation themes dominated the genre, while in France the heroic emblem literature focused on the position of the king): he also created a new sub-genre of amorous emblem literature which flourished in the Dutch Golden Age. The genre targeted the younger generation. A second love emblem book by Heinsius was

directed, according to its title, to ‘illustrious, honest, brave, virtuous, and sensible women’. What is so striking is that we have here the product of a rising philological superstar (Heinsius was Scaliger’s favourite pupil), occupied with highly specialized issues of early Byzantine Greek poetry, who at the same time turned to producing love emblems in the vernacular, accessible to a section of society that was never able to enter the institutions of formal education. Learning, again, was not just some specialization; it was heavily contextualized within a moral discourse of which the lessons applied equally to the scholar and the common folk. The main representative of the emblematic genre was no doubt Jacob Cats, whose emblem works were intended for the younger, middle, and older generations simultaneously by offering, respectively, lessons in love, in civil conduct, and in piety.

A Theatre of Education

Taken together, the pluriform educational landscape of the Golden Age provided a theatre of education which shaped oral, pictorial, and written cultures in Dutch and Latin to appeal to various layers of Dutch society and to numerous students abroad. Preachers taught moral lessons in church, professors delivered public lectures in the halls of a large number of education institutions, and students’ disputations were open to any male interested. Perhaps the Amsterdam professor of history and rhetoric Petrus Francius was not the only one to take his students to the theatre to show that the living word required appropriate body language. That oral education was accompanied by melodies. Printed songbooks and pamphlets containing songs were not limited to liturgical instruction, but also conveyed moral lessons in love and public conduct. Manuals, emblem books, and the use of natural historical drawing to portray the Book of Nature show that the culture of the image was not restricted to painting. The relative freedom of the presses, the high levels of male and female literacy, and the flourishing of philological culture were not simply the result of Protestantism’s emphasis on the written word, but bespoke the vibrant humanist Renaissance culture so typical of the urbanized regions of early modern Europe.

Notes

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Science and Technology

During the Dutch Golden Age, the Republic stood at the forefront of developments in the new science of the period.¹ While reading and debate about concepts remained fundamental to the development of the new science, other kinds of activities were added, ones that required the handling, tasting, manipulation, close inspection, and recording of material things, often aided by instruments. The result was a kind of knowledge that depended as much on what can be known from material devices and the bodily senses as by the mind, with determination of regularities found through methods of tangible proof as much as from logic, trust, or testimony. The new methods of investigation were costly, requiring rooms and cabinets for housing books, maps, illustrations and paintings, objects, and specimens; and they required access to specialized instruments and dedicated spaces, from mathematical and optical devices to chemical furnaces and anatomical dissecting rooms. They also required expertise – the knowledge acquired from having done something successfully on previous occasions – which often arose more from experience than from reasoning. Success in communicating the results and inferences of those activities also required conditions in which no single point of view could fully suppress its rivals. Consequently, the republican polity, educational institutions, commercial enterprises, and methods of war found during the Dutch Golden Age together fostered the expertise and infrastructure that made the country into an international powerhouse for mathematics, engineering, medicine, and natural philosophy.

In past generations, science was treated mainly as one of the highest branches of intellectual history. A long tradition in Europe and the United States treated science not only as a set of activities that promoted

material betterment but also as a secular religion that would help unite humankind around progressive ideals.² In the 1920s, historians of ideas who were not themselves scientists – many of whom studied the history of religion – turned to the history of science to locate the ‘metaphysical’ changes in Western society: in the Netherlands, the views of E. J. Dijksterhuis supported that interpretation.³ A decade later, Alexandre Koyré (who would work in Washington, DC, for the Gaullist government during the war) coined the term ‘scientific revolution’ to indicate the fundamental transformation that came with the ‘mathematization’ and ‘mechanization’ of the Western ‘world-view’.⁴ By the early 1960s, Koyré’s phrase had become common among English-speaking historians of science, too. The Weberian framework of such interpretations of modernity as a project of rationalization were very clear in the causal claims many historians made for the Protestant or even Puritan origins of science: the splendid works of R. Hooykaas often touched on such themes.⁵ The idealist and religious themes of such a view of science were also self-consciously opposed to the interpretation of science as a form of organized labour that framed many Soviet interpretations. This Great Tradition of the Scientific Revolution has been very well studied in recent years by Floris Cohen.⁶ Since the 1970s, however, many historians of science have sought to understand early modern science within social and cultural frameworks, with key interpretations arising from Michel Foucault, Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, and Bruno Latour, among others.⁷ Following them, new generations have come to see science not as a set of theories but as a range of practices engaging with the material world, sharing information and objects rather than mutual understandings; this move has also begun to open the study of the history of science to non-Western connections, with communication carried on by ‘brokers’ and intermediaries, sometimes in pidgin languages.⁸ That kind of approach links the new science of the Dutch Golden Age more to the decentred but co-ordinated structures of the Republic than to the predominance of Calvinism.

Infrastructures of the New Science

The active development of the infrastructures required by the new science lay well beyond the efforts of the people best known for their studies, and are covered in more detail elsewhere in this book, including

Chapters 17 and 19. For instance, no matter what religion they professed, the people of the Netherlands were often eager to understand God's ways, which also encouraged the study of creation and its creatures. But at the same time ministers, priests, mystics, and rabbis often felt compelled to bring their followers back to the rules and laws of their faith as they understood it. An example of the consequent friction is how most astrologers and astronomers, as well as many ordinary people and patricians (*regenten*), openly held the view that the earth was a planet that spun on its own orbit while circling the sun, making the Republic into one of the nurseries of Copernicanism, yet one of the most powerful leaders of the Calvinists, Gisbertus Voetius, objected to it on scriptural grounds. He found, however, that he did not have the legal or political power to keep Copernicanism from being discussed either in print or in schools.

Similarly, Voetius objected vehemently to materialist views about human physiology that flowed from the theories of René Descartes, who was living in the Netherlands (probably as an exile from Richelieu's France). Voetius especially objected to the proposition that the human soul is an 'accident' of our bodily constitution, and because of his senior position at Utrecht University he managed to get the school to suppress Cartesianism for a time. But Descartes rallied many of his influential friends in his defence, so in Leiden similar raucous debates caused the governing magistrates to try to prevent the disputes from disturbing the peace. Ironically, then, anyone arguing publicly against Cartesianism ran risks as great as anyone arguing for it. In such circumstances, clever people found ways to support or undermine their favoured concepts in private, by indirect means, or by dissimulation, as when professors introduced Cartesian principles into their lectures on Aristotle.

Debates about nature or aspects of it were of much interest well beyond the universities. The levels of literacy and numeracy in the Dutch Republic were probably the highest of any place in Europe at the time, among women as well as men. Church and song schools were common; Latin Schools, Illustrious Schools, and universities were numerous.⁹ Orphanages made a point of educating their young inmates and training them for productive labour; guilds and fraternities required various kinds of skills and knowledge of their members; tutors in the polite languages of French and Italian abounded; and at least in the early part of the seventeenth century Chambers of Rhetoric

(*rederijerskamers*, a kind of literary club) continued to encourage the further development of eloquent public speaking in Dutch and Latin. Many corporate bodies, such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC) or the groups draining marshes, established examinations for competence before they would appoint to posts that required technical ability, such as surveyor, navigator, or chart-maker. In such circumstances formal knowledge of aspects of nature had high value.

Private teachers and specialized instructors publicly competed for pupils. Sometimes the pupils were girls or young women, as in the example of the noted Anna Maria van Schurman, who became an important early supporter of Cartesianism. Advanced instruction in subjects such as navigation and surveying, which required not only methods of calculation but also the use of instruments, could be found in most cities. One of the best-known tutors was Petrus Plancius, a Calvinist minister who had fled from Brussels to Amsterdam and brought with him a knowledge of Portuguese charts and routes to the East Indies. Not only did he become a founding member of the VOC and deeply involved in a number of Dutch projects to find northern routes to the East, but he also composed many maps of the world and the heavens (including the southern stars) using the Mercator projection, proposed a method for finding longitude, and set up courses in an Amsterdam church for instructing others in navigation and mapmaking. Similarly, the remarkable mathematician and engineer, Simon Stevin, fled to the Republic and became one of the most ingenious inventors of the period, becoming known as an advocate of the decimal system, the instructor of Prince Maurice of Orange, and the promoter of double-entry bookkeeping for the Republic's financial system. Few other teachers of mathematical sciences became as famous as Plancius or Stevin, but in the Northern Netherlands people with similar backgrounds and interests were numerous and competitive, eager to demonstrate their knowledge and expertise.

A constant need for mathematically competent practitioners also came from the military activities of the Republic, since not just the defensive and offensive methods of siege warfare but even the manoeuvring of troops and the actions of individual swordsmen in duels were calculated according to geometrical and arithmetical principles. (Encrypting and decrypting messages – critical to important military and diplomatic communications – were also rooted in mathematical patterns.)¹⁰ The Old Dutch system of fortification, which added

hydraulics to the *trace italienne* of bastioned earthworks, developed from the practices of Adriaen Anthonisz of Alkmaar, known as Metius. At the university in Franeker, his son Adriaan Metius, one of Prince Maurice's trusted military engineers, took up a professorship in 1600. There he taught not only mathematics and astronomy but also surveying, navigation, and engineering (in Dutch), and continued to design new and improved instruments such as astrolabes and sextants. In 1600, too, Prince Maurice and Stevin transformed Leiden University's fencing school into the 'Duytsche Mathematique', which used university lecture halls to train several generations of well-to-do young gentlemen in the latest methods of practical mathematics, in the Dutch language. Its graduates included not only many excellent surveyors and engineers, but also future *regenten* with high-level mathematical competence, such as Johannes Hudde, Hendrik van Heuraet, Christiaan Huygens, and Johan de Witt (the future grand pensionary of Holland); because of the importance of lotteries to the fundraising of governments in the Republic, such figures became known not only as politicians but also as contributors to the subjects of actuarial mathematics and probability theory.

Given the founding of the engineering school, the university in Leiden itself also appointed Rudolph Snel van Royen to a chair in mathematics in 1601, he having previously taught the subject as an adjunct (professor *extraordinarius*). His son, Willebrord Snel (Snellius), who succeeded him in 1613, became known for his studies of conic sections, a very important part of the latest mathematics. But Snel is perhaps best known for a kind of technical feat: by carefully surveying, in triangular sections, the exact distance between the cities of Alkmaar and Bergen op Zoom – a line later extended to Mechelen/Malines – he computed the length of a degree of longitude and so the circumference of the earth. He was succeeded by Jacob Golius, a professor of 'oriental' languages who returned from a tour of the eastern Mediterranean in 1629 with several important mathematical texts in Arabic (including the Arabic translation of Apollonius of Perga's fundamental work on *Conics*). In 1633 the university built an astronomical observatory for Golius and his students on the roof of the main university building.

Just as practical problems promoted the study of advanced mathematics and new and exacting instruments, so too the widespread technical expertise of the country promoted the new science more generally.

A great variety of skilled artisans and entrepreneurs could be found throughout the Republic. In fact, the country's political and military success depended on its ability to carry a high national debt without default, which in turn depended on new sources of income, including overseas commercial-military ventures.¹¹ The original *sine qua non* of Dutch wealth might be said to be its ship-building industry, which was also associated with advanced port infrastructure, warehouses and exchanges, agricultural and food-processing innovations, waterworks, energy regimes that included windmills, heavy industries such as weapons manufacturing, a host of new consumer goods such as tobacco pipes and distilled alcohol – even diamond cutting – and processing industries such as chemical bleaching and dyeing. For instance, 'Holland beaters', which cut rather than hammered rags into pulp, helped to sustain a sizeable paper industry that produced strong, bright, and smooth-grained paper; it became the point of comparison for the rest of Europe as well as fuelling the considerable printing industry and even the Republic of Letters. Skilled trades often required literacy and numeracy, establishing a public eager for books and pamphlets that, among other things, described and debated the natural world and its underlying structures.

The Instruments of Knowledge

In fact, one cannot imagine the high level and widespread interest in early modern Dutch science without including the artisans, including the makers of specialized glassware for chemical production and experimentation, fine lens grinders (most famously Baruch de Spinoza), and makers of intricate mathematical and optical instruments for surveying and astronomy. These artisans produced for international as well as domestic markets and often developed into scientific experts themselves. In the middle of the century, for instance, the Musschenbroek family of Leiden, who originally produced brass instruments, became known for their knowledgeable ability in constructing exacting scientific devices from many kinds of materials, with the designers and experimentalists consulting together.

One of the most famous examples of technical expertise mixed with learning was the Dutch invention of the telescope and possibly of the microscope as well. Artisans with glass-manufacturing skills began to

arrive in the Republic in the 1580s, benefiting people who needed either glass bottles for shipping or window glass for homes, but also yielding semi-luxury products such as tableware and spectacles. Lens-grinding grew into a regular occupation and was associated with the subject of optics. In the summer of 1608 one of the craftsmen of the trade, Hans Lipperhey, from Middelburg, applied for a patent for an instrument with lenses at each end of a tube for 'seeing far'. In The Hague, Prince Maurice and his brother Frederick Henry looked through his device and were immediately impressed with its potential usefulness in military and naval engagements, and their counterpart, the Spanish general Ambrogio Spinola – in residence during treaty negotiations – was equally impressed. Lipperhey may have derived his optical wonder from an earlier invention by Sacharias Janssen (also a lens-maker from Middelburg). But in October Jacob Metius, brother of Adriaan Metius of Franeker, arrived to state that he had been working on a similar device since 1606: evidence points to him having shown his telescope, as the instrument came to be called, at the Frankfurt book fair in August 1608, where he was promoting his brother's *Institutionum astronomicarum* (1608). In the end the States General did not issue a patent because it was determined that the instrument was too easy to duplicate. But news quickly spread, and by the summer of 1609 Galileo was improving the method of its making and turning it to the heavens, soon becoming famous for his *Siderius Nuncius* (1610).¹²

It may be that not long afterward Cornelis Drebbel, a very ingenious inventor and experimenter from Alkmaar, who had been introduced to alchemy by the famous engraver Jacob de Gheyn, began his efforts to develop a similar double-lens instrument for examining small objects, which would become a microscope. By the middle of the century, however, cheap single-lens devices made from tiny drops of glass were known for yielding higher magnifications with less distortion. It was apparently Hudde – a burgomaster of Amsterdam and former student of the Duytsche Mathematique in Leiden – who showed a city official of Delft, Anthonie van Leeuwenhoek, how to make such lenses. Improving on the common methods to obtain magnifications up to 270 times, even without Latin or a university degree, Van Leeuwenhoek became a well-known virtuoso of the new science because of the discoveries he made of hitherto unimagined living bodies, including animalcules (single-celled organisms), red blood cells, and human and animal spermatozoa. Perhaps his interests in optics were stimulated by his Delft neighbor,

Jan Vermeer – also without a university degree – who may have been using a camera obscura as an aid in his painting. In other words, the telescope and microscope – signature instruments of the new science – emerged from the mixed artisanal, mathematical, and manufacturing milieu found in cities such as Middelburg, Franeker, Alkmaar, Amsterdam, and Delft.

Consequences for the Understanding of Natural Bodies

The growing use of optical and mathematical instruments for the exact study of worldly phenomena had a large and powerful impact on theories of nature, too. It caused many natural philosophers to consider nature as rooted in number, and others to think of the body as an instrument that registers sense impressions from the other material bodies around us which the mind/brain interprets, acting like an instrument itself. Scholastic philosophers of the period continued to align themselves with the classical view about how the mind directly apprehends things by their qualities – such as their colour, temperature, or virtues – which were in turn an expression of the hylomorphic unity of matter and form that characterized bodily identities as essences. But instrumentalist and materialist investigations helped to support arguments about how qualities were, rather, secondary phenomena arising from matter in motion. For instance, Descartes, who wrote all the works published during his lifetime during his exile in the Republic from 1629 to 1649, employed the metaphor of a blind man using sticks to understand the world around him: the sticks conveyed physical impressions to the brain from the hand via the nerves, which the brain interpreted in order to organize a three-dimensional representation of the tangible world. The inputs were not ‘qualities’, then, but material touches. Galileo had argued that the mind knew heat only because fiery particles touched our skin and conveyed sense impressions to the brain; Descartes went on to say that it is the speed of the motion and spin of material corpuscles that cause us to feel them as cold or hot, and so on. In other words, the brain – with the pineal gland at the centre – was itself a sense organ, and almost all our thinking came from ordering our bodily impressions and passions into interpretable patterns, making our bodies and even our minds into physical instruments. He also allowed that humans, unlike animals, possess a rational soul that can grasp

mathematical truths and the like intuitively, and that we have enough volition to be able to pass on our thoughts to other minds through language and symbol. But otherwise the world was composed simply of three-dimensional matter in motion, making instruments into extensions of our senses and allowing otherwise unobserved phenomena to be discerned in thought.

Descartes' emphasis on the physical, embodied world caused him on several occasions to write that the chief goal of his philosophy was the preservation of life and prolongation of health, a classical ideal carried out with new methods. Those methods included the study of anatomy and chemistry, which he could explore actively in the Netherlands with his many friends who had medical qualifications. In the 1630s, for instance, he worked with Amsterdam physicians such as François de le Boë Sylvius – who later became a notable professor of medicine at the university in Leiden – and with the anatomist Vopiscus Fortunatus Plempius – who took a position as professor at Louvain in 1633, where he disputed many of Descartes' ideas but eventually came to accept the circulation of the blood. It was Descartes' acquaintance, Henricus Regius, a professor of medical theory, who introduced Cartesian physiological propositions to Utrecht, causing the first controversies over that aspect of the new philosophy. Descartes would continue to study anatomy and physiology until the end of his time in the Republic, even spending considerable sums on cows obtained from butchers in order to understand the development of the foetus in the uterus.

Descartes owed much of his physico-mathematics to a Dutch acquaintance, Isaac Beeckman. Beeckman came from the artisanal milieu of Middelburg – his father made candlesticks and he himself became engaged in waterworks – but with enough private tutoring and self-study Beeckman earned a medical degree in Caen in 1618; on his return he stopped in Breda for a few weeks, where he encountered the young Descartes, who had come to learn the art of war. That meant that Descartes was beginning the study of military engineering, and Beeckman helped him with his studies, conveying to his pupil his own excitement about an atomistic view of nature that could be studied mathematically. Beeckman later taught at the advanced Latin Schools of Rotterdam and Dordrecht, founding a 'Collegium Mechanicum' in the former that included other artisans and magistrates in the co-operative study of physical phenomena using instruments.

Specimens and Collections

The new science depended not only on philosophy and instruments, however, but also on specimens, preferably tangible items but otherwise careful drawings in three-dimensional perspective, in proportion, and with shading to give a sense of fullness. (When colour was important it might be applied in paints or watercolours, or indicated in an accompanying written description.) A marvellous example comes from the 'fishbook' of the 1580s compiled by the wholesale fish merchant of Scheveningen, Adriaen Coenen. He collected strange creatures from the sea and often sold them to others as specimens, while he also made watercolour drawings of them and of creatures he heard about, accompanied by written comment.¹³ Coenen's personal efforts show the widespread acceptance of pictures of things and descriptive words as substitutes for their real presence. Scholars who intended to publish their findings took special care to use words and drawings as accurately as possible, often employing expert draughtsmen to depict plants and animals as accurately as possible. For example, Carolus Clusius, who became famous as the chief Netherlandish early tulip fancier as well as the first curator of the Leiden *hortus*, published several botanical studies and advocated collecting watercolour studies. The associations between the widespread enthusiasm for naturalia and the efflorescence of manuscript and printed flower painting in the early seventeenth century can hardly be disentangled.

But collecting of images was a kind of substitute for collecting examples of the things themselves, whether in gardens or cabinets. By the later sixteenth century some people were becoming known for the size and quality of their collections of items of natural history. An example is Berent ten Broecke (better known as Bernardus Paludanus) who travelled in Europe, Syria, and Egypt before settling into a position as municipal physician in the port of Enkhuisen in north Holland. On his travels and afterward Paludanus collected many specimens of minerals, plants, and animals. He also collected curious human-made artifacts. By the 1590s his 'cabinet' was famous, and the curators of the new university in Leiden tried to attract him to a professorship there if he agreed to bring his collection. He stayed in Enkhuisen, however, coming to know Jan Huygen van Linschoten on the latter's return there from the Portuguese East Indies. Linschoten's famous *Itinerario* (1596) described maritime Asia in some detail and

helped to promote Dutch ventures in the region; less often recognized is that Paludanus added a considerable amount of information to it from books and specimens in his possession. A century later, a Delft physician, Hendrik D'Acquet, who had been acquiring shells and other items from a former official of the VOC in Amboina, Georg Eberhard Rumphius, managed to organize the making of proper illustrations for an edition of Rumphius' *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* by having the drawings made from the items in his own and others' cabinets.¹⁴

Early naturalist collectors included apothecaries. They had originally been importers of exotic spices, medicinal simples (from the parts of plants, animals, and minerals), and other unusual products of nature, developing an expertise in identifying one kind of item from another and assessing their freshness and potency. (The word 'drugs' came from the 'dried' condition of substances transported over long distances.) Retail pharmacists handled such items in smaller amounts and mixed them appropriately into medicinal compounds. In the Netherlands they often had wooden shop signs showing a person in exotic dress with an open mouth or even a tongue sticking out: *gapers* associated with the practice of swallowing medicines from afar in the form of pills or potions. Apothecaries usually had the ability to make chemical extracts and other such products as well. Their shops are often depicted with floor-to-ceiling shelves well stocked with labelled earthenware jars containing the various substances, sometimes also with a garden out back and exotic animal skins (such as crocodiles), to suggest the rich knowledge of natural detail they possessed from around the world. For example, one of the biggest collectors of the early seventeenth century was Jan Jacobsz Swammerdam, owner of De Star, a pharmacy near the Montelsbaenstoren on the Amsterdam quays for the East and West India Companies, who collected all kinds of objects, with specimens from nature figuring importantly among them. His son, Jan Swammerdam, later became an important naturalist and physician, and wrote up a very lengthy catalogue in order to sell the cabinet after his father's death. A century later, it was Albertus Seba, who also owned a pharmacy near the Amsterdam harbour, who became known as one of the greatest collectors. In 1716 Tsar Peter the Great bought him out, and Seba started over again; the latter published his rich and accurate *Thesaurus* (or 'Treasury') of natural history in 1734.¹⁵

The widespread demand in the Netherlands for specimens, drawings, and accurate information about exotic creatures from little-known

parts of the world therefore drove collectors to pay substantial sums; both ordinary sailors and well-educated employees of the VOC and West India Company (WIC) came to act as field collectors and suppliers. They also recorded in the field. For instance, Jacobus Bontius, the first physician in the employ of the VOC to take up residence in the Dutch capital of Batavia, on Java, drew and described the local plants and creatures (as well as the diseases and medicines of the region). The relatively brief period of Dutch occupation of Brazil remains commemorated in the rich paintings of Frans Post and the well-illustrated volume of natural history compiled by Willem Piso and Georg Marcgraf, *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (1648), dedicated to the memory of the former governor, the 'sugar prince' Maurice. Later in the century Maria Sibylla Merian and her daughter were funded by major Amsterdam collectors such as Nicholas Witsen (a burgomaster and board member of the VOC) to travel to Suriname in order to explore its natural history and to bring back specimens and drawings. One result was the remarkable *Metamorphosis insectorum* of 1705, which contained about sixty folio-sized engravings of the plants and insects of the region.¹⁶

For their part, people in the field depended on being able to acquire items and information from local knowledge brokers, who were often indigenous people or people of mixed race and ethnicity (and multilingual abilities). The Dutch collectors sifted and winnowed what they heard, leaving aside the kinds of ideas about natural things and their powers that they thought were 'superstitious' in order to focus on the objects alone. Much of the information about nature sent back to the Netherlands, like the specimens themselves, was therefore turned into robust and transportable regularities: this was 'objective' science because it was about objects, disentangled from circumstance so as to be the same in any place it was examined.

Studying Natural Bodies

Medical interests drove other kinds of investigations about nature, too. As the examples of Descartes and Beeckman suggest, the subject knowledge represented in the medical doctorates possessed by 'physicians' was termed *physique* or 'physic', a word derived from the Greek word for nature, *physis*. The main effort of the professors was to instruct students in the regular operations of nature and the living things found in it,

with the practice of physicians themselves often based on the exercise of good judgement in listening to and advising clients and patients on how to maintain or regain health. But the medical faculties also connected classroom lecturing and debate to hands-on investigations. The more common Dutch term for 'doctor', *geneesheer*, meant a gentleman of recovery, and medicine was *geneeskunde*, the art of recovery. Even the term *medici*, used for university-educated doctors, echoed the Roman verb for doing something to a body or cloth to change its nature, *medico*: to transform something by a tincture or dye or to treat with a medicinal substance. To enact such changes required not only learned discourse but also artisanal experience.

As the examples from natural history indicate, medics had therefore been in the forefront of promoting the publication of natural *observationes*, often otherwise termed *historia*, as in natural history or case histories. They also needed to understand the simples and compounds used by ordinary people or sold by apothecaries, which had powerful physiological effects. Some of the well-known poetry of Jan Six van Chandelier, for example, may have been affected by his personal experiences of perceiving the world afresh after sampling some of the drugs he handled in his pharmacy.¹⁷ Such ingredients could cause accidental or intentional harm, giving rise to regulation. In Amsterdam, for instance, Dr Nicolaes Tulp, who served as a burgomaster, established a Collegium Medicum in 1638 to write a municipal pharmacopoeia, or list of approved drugs. The Collegium also came to supervise the surgeons' guild and eventually to examine the midwives as well. Other Collegia Medica were founded in The Hague in 1658, Middelburg in 1668, Haarlem in 1692, and in other cities thereafter. Such organizations were important not only for ordering the medical practices of their cities but also for fostering conversation among their members about medical knowledge.

Similarly, medicinal gardens began to appear in many places, at first privately (often behind pharmacies) and later publicly. These fulfilled the growing perceived need for instruction in recognizing medicinal plants. But they also served the edification and pleasure that ordinary people found in curious and exotic plants without medical uses, which they often grew in their own gardens as well. Partly stimulated by botanical collectors, the university in Leiden invested in space for a *hortus* for the use of students and the public about 1593, which was soon headed by Clusius; the plants were probably laid out, however, by

the experienced apothecary from Delft, Dirk Outgers Cluyt (or Clutius), who had a large garden of his own. In Amsterdam, the *hortus* developed in conjunction with the municipal hospital, the Binnengasthuis (or Pietersgasthuis), which grew into a garden for training students and pharmaceutical apprentices under the direction of the Collegium Medicum in 1638. By 1646 its director earned a salary paid by the city as well as holding a teaching appointment at the city's Athenaeum (established in 1632). But it, too, developed its high international reputation not only because of its many medicinal herbs but also because of its larger stores of curious and exotic specimens, most imported from Dutch commercial ventures overseas.

Attempts to investigate and demonstrate the details of human anatomy led to additional foundations. Along with a botanical garden, a permanent anatomical theatre was constructed for the university in Leiden, opened in 1597 in the Faliede Bagijnenkerk – a former chapel that also contained the library and the fencing school – under the direction of Professor Pieter Pauw (related to a powerful regent family of Amsterdam). When a public anatomy lesson was to be performed in this theatre-in-the-round, all students were notified and city dignitaries were invited (the interested public was charged for admission). But because the wonders of the human body were necessary not only for physicians but also for teaching general moral lessons, when the theatre was not in use for anatomy lessons it exhibited skeletons and other natural objects, many holding flags with mottoes meant to convey messages, such as the shortness of life, to visitors and onlookers.

Expert knowledge of the body was not confined to the universities, however. Surgeons' guilds had often acquired formal access to the bodies of executed criminals or the poor who died in municipal hospitals in order to hold anatomical lectures in which full dissections would be performed for the instruction of their members and the public. The instructors themselves were usually university-educated physicians known for their expertise in anatomy. The anatomies were so important to the self-identification of the surgeons that paintings of them with their lecturers were sometimes commissioned. The most famous is the 'Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp' by Rembrandt of 1632, showing Tulp lecturing to the Amsterdam surgeons' guild on the body of Adriaen Kint so as to demonstrate the anatomical structures of the arm allowing the forefinger to touch the thumb; since the opposable thumb is a sign of the singular abilities of humans, his was also a lecturer on the

wonders of God's creation. A few years later, in 1639, the Amsterdam surgeons' guild opened a new anatomical theatre that attracted much public interest, and many other surgeons' guilds followed suit elsewhere in the Republic.

Most notably, new methods of embalming turned cabinets limited to dry specimens into ones that included 'wet' specimens. Around 1650 a Flemish minor nobleman, Louis de Bils, shared some human bodies and body parts preserved by his new methods with professors and students in Leiden and soon exhibited several others in Rotterdam. The results set off multiple studies into new methods for preserving soft animal tissue not only in the form of embalmed corpses but also as wet specimens in bottles. Within a decade or two the new methods of preservation – often using an exudation from a shrub found in the Middle East called turpentine, usually mixed with strong alcohols – coupled with methods of injection of wax, mercury, and other substances, were allowing soft tissues to be seen and traced through the body in ways previously unimaginable. When such methods were used alongside the new and powerful microscopes, a revolution in understanding the fine structures of the body took place, led by young Leiden investigators such as Jan Swammerdam and Renier de Graaf. Swammerdam later became especially well known for his studies of the anatomy of insects, being the first person to show that the chief of a hive of bees possesses a uterus and is therefore a queen bee, not a king (as the politically convenient wisdom had it). But he and De Graaf became embroiled in a dispute over who deserved the most credit for identifying and publicizing the fine details of the human organs of generation: for a time, it was considered that De Graaf had discovered the human egg, although his discovery turned out to be the follicles that produced the egg (which itself was so small that it would not be seen until more than a hundred years later). At the end of the century the anatomical cabinet of Frederick Ruysch had such a marvellous display of embalmed babies, specimens of human and animal body parts in glass jars, and dioramas composed of foetal skeletons, bladder stones, and hardened body parts that it was considered one of the great wonders of the time – and was purchased by the Russian tsar Peter the Great.

Such wonders could not have been produced without a growing knowledge of chemistry, also encouraged in the lively and inclusive urban worlds of educated artisans. The growing popularity of chemically prepared remedies was often associated with the name of the Swiss-

German Paracelsus. Many Dutch practitioners adopted Paracelsian ideas and methods, translating his works into their own language. Medical chemists ('iatrochemists') sought to separate the complex substances found in nature into their essential components or elements in order to find the active ingredients – hence the Dutch word for chemistry, *scheikunde*, or 'art of separation'. The processes of separation operated by applying heat to material things, often in multiple stages over long periods of time, using the mild heat of dung-heaps to the high temperatures produced in blast furnaces: the practitioners necessarily invested a great deal of money in metal and glass utensils, and stoves and furnaces, to say nothing of the wood, peat, and coal for the fires and the herbal, mineral, and sometimes even animal substances whose active properties they sought to isolate. From their complex practices they sometimes claimed to have found not only the philosopher's stone, allowing the transmutation of base metals into noble ones, but one or more panaceas, which could cure any illness. Even without such grand claims, the resultant chemical liquids and salves could be kept sealed for freshness in stoppered glass or earthen vessels for long periods of time, moved about easily, and sold on to individuals in smaller containers, thus making them readily vendible. Chemistry was taught at universities by extra-curricular tutors, including Sylvius – mentioned above in relation to Descartes – and from 1669 Carel de Maets taught it as a regular curricular subject at Leiden, with furnaces built in a corner of the botanical garden.

New ideas and processes continued to come from the iatrochemists. For instance, Johann Rudolf Glauber, who around 1640 settled in Amsterdam for several years, had begun by manufacturing mirrors (by applying silvered mercury to glass) but soon turned to other processes, becoming most famous for his production of sodium sulfate or Glauber's salt, a mild laxative. One of the people who worked with him, Sylvius, gained an appointment as a professor in Leiden and became known for his chemical teaching there, where he proposed that all phenomena could be divided into the chemical processes of fermentation, effervescence, or putrefaction. Some of his students, particularly Swammerdam, De Graaf, and Niels Stensen (Nicolas Steno) became famous in their own right for their painstaking and fundamental physiological-chemical experiments and demonstrations. But Sylvius' legacy also lives on in the form of genever, distilled with juniper berries as a cordial, a remedy to strengthen the heart.

The Dutch introduced the Japanese to genever, too, through their trading station on Nagasaki. Dutch medicine turned out to be one of the subjects of most interest to the Japanese government and its translators, and in the middle of the century they required the VOC to send them someone with knowledge beyond what they had gleaned from the surgeons who accompanied the annual trading ships, asking in particular for someone who could answer their questions in chemistry and botany. Willem ten Rhijne obtained the appointment and served at the Deshima station from 1674 to 1676 (and in Batavia thereafter), having many encounters with physicians and translators during which he tried to answer their questions. They began to learn anatomy and chemistry from him and other Dutch residents in Nagasaki. But Ten Rhijne in turn took advantage of the exchange to ask about Japanese and Chinese medicine. One result was his work, published by the Royal Society of London, *Dissertatio de Arthritide* (1683), the first formally to introduce European audiences to acupuncture and some of the concepts behind it. After returning to Batavia, Ten Rhijne also helped a former governor of the Malabar coast, Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, compile his multi-volume work on the natural history of south-west India (*Hortus Indicus Malabaricus*, 1678–93). Van Reede relied very heavily on local scholars and other informants, as well as chemical analysis of the medicinal simples.

In other words, underneath the surface of the Dutch overseas enterprises, in the midst of the multiple encounters and crossings among many kinds of people that they fostered, people exchanged information about nature and medicine, as well as navigation and astronomy, with each side finding something worth taking from the other. The knowledge exchanges might not be equal, but nor were they simply forced. They sometimes even offered opportunities to speak with people of other cultural traditions in situations where respect prevailed among all the parties. Information flowed through the trade routes along with their material goods.

The New ‘Virtuosity’ Embodied: Christiaan Huygens

The sum total of all the many activities related to the new science in the Netherlands can be captured in the work of one of the most important and wide-ranging virtuosi of the period: Christiaan Huygens. His father, Constantijn, was the well-known secretary to the prince of

Orange and an active member of the Republic of Letters who took an interest in all kinds of learning in and beyond the Netherlands. The son was educated mainly by tutors, including Descartes' mathematical friend and professor in Leiden, Frans van Schooten the Younger. During the 1650s Christiaan studied and published on hydrostatics, mathematics, and optics, but also took an interest in medicines. He started to make telescopes with his brother (named Constantijn after their father) in 1654, discovered a new moon of Saturn, and proposed that the 'ears' barely to be discerned with it were the result of a ring. In 1657 he published a foundational study of a new form of clock that used a pendulum to regulate time very accurately. He also worked to improve the microscope, with which he made many observations as a part of his studies in natural history. He took up a position in the newly founded Académie des sciences in Paris, although as tensions grew between Louis XIV and Protestants he retreated to The Hague in 1681, publishing an important work on the wave theory of light in 1690 in response to Newton.

While Huygens was from the highest-ranking social circles in the Republic, and a very well-educated and renowned investigator and scholar, his work represents not just the excellence of his mind and the cutting edge of physico-mathematical theory; if one digs only a little bit deeper one can see in his achievements both the breadth of topics associated with the new science and the exacting knowledge-work of the artisans he consulted in order to produce his instruments and results. Had Herman Boerhaave (the Leiden professor so famous that he reputedly received a letter from Morocco simply addressed 'to Prof Boerhaave, Holland') added his expertise in medicine, chemistry, anatomy, and natural history to Huygens', all of the new sciences would have been represented in one man.

Conclusion

In the Republic, then, a decentralized political system connected by commercial exchanges, coupled with high levels of literacy and widespread interest in God's creation, was underpinned by military necessity and a common aim to extract 'improvements' from the material world for human benefit and their own flourishing: all this created the conditions in which the new science developed rapidly. The objective

results were meant to be applicable anywhere in the world. Of course, personal ingenuity and intellectual brilliance were also necessary, but these are presumably present in any and all societies; the question for historians is under what circumstances there are opportunities for people to engage in the kinds of activities that led to practices of mind and body that we recognize as scientific. The Dutch Golden Age was rooted in materialism, both commercial and philosophical. Materialist values were so prevalent, and the opportunities to act on them were so many, that the new science could grow from the ground up rather than be paid for by princely largesse, as in most of the rest of Europe. The new sciences of the Republic also did not need the protection of a prince in order to keep their enemies from destroying them, as in Paris or London where royal societies were established for the sciences. Guilds, collegia, schools and universities, and informal associations all helped to further the collaborative efforts and great expenses necessary for the pursuit of a new objectivity grounded in all the parts of creation. Above all, the well-educated *regenten* themselves took a personal interest in the new science, whether technical or medical, avidly collecting books and specimens and pushing their local schools to appoint instructors connected to the latest work, even if it made them uncomfortable. The same confluence of material and educational interests that supported the Republic encouraged the sciences of the Dutch Golden Age.

Notes

1. The use of the word 'science' can be misleading, since at the time it mainly referred to philosophical knowledge claims that had conclusive certainty, whereas much of the descriptive 'new science' was probabilistic. Nevertheless, the range of activities included within the modern term (such as laboratories, anatomical theatres, instruments, and technical devices) is not well captured by the phrase 'natural philosophy', which was only a subset of the activities described here. I therefore use 'science' as a shorthand designation for the investigation of nature.
2. The oeuvre of the Belgian George Sarton is a fine example. See, for instance, G. Sarton, *The History of Science and the New Humanism*, Cambridge, MA, 1937.
3. His essays can be found in E. J. Dijksterhuis, *Clio's Stiefkind*, ed. K. van Berkel, Amsterdam, 1990.
4. A. Koyré, *Études galiléennes*, Paris, 1939.
5. For example, R. Hooykaas, *Humanism, science, et réforme: Pierre de la Rameé (1515–1572)*, Leiden, 1958.
6. Especially F. Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*, Chicago, 1994; F. Cohen, *How Modern Science Came into the World: Four Civilizations, One Seventeenth-Century Breakthrough*, Amsterdam, 2010.

7. For example, M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York, 1973; S. Shapin and S. Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, Princeton, 1986; B. Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*, Cambridge, MA, 1987.
8. For example, H. J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age*, New Haven, 2007; S. Schaffer, L. Roberts, K. Raj, and J. Delbourgo (eds.), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820*, Sagamore Beach, MA, 2009.
9. Universities were established in Leiden (1575), Franeker (1585), Groningen (1614), Utrecht (1636), Harderwijk (1648), and Nijmegen (1655–79); Illustrious Schools were founded in Deventer (1630), Amsterdam (1632), Utrecht (1634), and later at Dordrecht, 's Hertogenbosch, Breda, Middelburg, Zutphen, and Maastricht.
10. D. Kahn, *The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing*, New York, 1996, esp. 125–56.
11. M. 't Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence: Warfare and Commerce in the Netherlands 1570–1680*, London, 2014.
12. A. Dijkstra, 'Between Academics and Idiots: A Cultural History of Mathematics in the Dutch Province of Friesland (1600–1700)', PhD dissertation, Twente University, 2012, 132–54.
13. F. Egmond and P. Mason (eds.), *The Whale Book: Whales and Other Marine Animals as Described by Adriaen Coenen in 1585*, London, 2003.
14. G. E. Rumphius, *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, ed. E. M. Beekman, New Haven, 1999.
15. E. Bergvelt and R. Kistemaker (eds.), *De Wereld Binnen Handbereik. Nederlandse Kunst- En Rareitenverzamelingen, 1585–1735*, Zwolle, 1992.
16. D. Kühn, *Frau Merian! Eine Lebensgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main, 2003;
P. J. P. Whitehead and M. Boeseman, *A Portrait of Dutch Seventeenth-Century Brazil: Animals, Plants and People by the Artists of Johan Maurits of Nassau*, Amsterdam, 1989.
17. R. Spaans, 'Godenbloed te koop: Exotica, extase en verboden kennis in de poëzie van Joannes Six van Chandelier (1620–1695)', PhD dissertation, University of Oslo, 2014.

Radical Thought

The question of how far Dutch radical thought in the second half of the seventeenth century marks the starting point of the wider Western 'Radical Enlightenment' has been fiercely contested among scholars in recent years. But that the circle of intellectuals around the philosopher Baruch de Spinoza, the so-called *cercle spinoziste*, does indeed mark the starting point of what became a major wing of the early Western Enlightenment is now broadly agreed among most specialists working specifically on this group and its context. On the level of intellectual influences this radical tendency, which arose in Amsterdam but also in The Hague, Leiden and other Dutch cities from the 1660s onwards, was the outcome of a number of long-term factors – the result partly of the early and unusually deep impact in the Netherlands of Cartesianism, partly the exceptionally divided and pluralistic character of Dutch religious life, and finally also of the unusual intensity of Dutch scientific enquiry and research in the age of Christiaan Huygens and Anthonie van Leeuwenhoek.

In particular, the revolutionary new Cartesian world-view dividing all of reality into two sharply differentiated realms – mind/spirit and extension – had a divisive and disturbing effect on general culture and intellectual life. The rules governing everything that is a body or is physical were declared strictly mechanistic and deterministic; the reality governing minds, souls, and spirits, including God, were proclaimed altogether separate, different, and largely unknown to us except through religious authority. As a consequence, the relationship between religion and philosophical reason, unlike in earlier periods, became highly charged, unstable, and tense.

At the same time, while the wider cultural context was certainly of great importance, the defining contribution which the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic made to laying the foundations of the radical democratic tendency in pre-1789 Western thought, and forging a tradition of underground clandestine philosophical literature in French which circulated widely in Europe towards the end of the seventeenth century and during the early eighteenth, stemmed most directly from the precarious and unusual nature of the dynamic and innovative Republic founded by the Dutch Revolt against Habsburg Spain, and by its obviously vulnerable international situation.

The Dutch Republic's General Predicament

Unlike the governing oligarchies in the Venetian and Genoese Republics, the regent groups controlling the States of Holland and Zeeland, and partially controlling the other five Dutch provinces, could not claim to be a long-standing civic 'nobility'. But, unlike the patriciates dominating the Swiss cantons, and such German city republics as Hamburg and Frankfurt, neither could they rely on a traditionally largely uncontested political dominance. In this respect they were unique: despite offering the citizenry a greater degree of religious toleration, and more individual liberty and freedom of expression than other European patriciates, they proved more unstable than any of these. No less than three times – in 1618–19, in 1650, and in 1672 – first Stadholder Maurice and then, in turn, William II and William III challenged, overthrew, and drastically purged the Dutch patrician oligarchy of 'regents'. This prolonged and irresolvable structural instability disrupted the country's small civic oligarchies in the first place but, due to the immanent loss of civic and provincial autonomy apt to result, and the House of Orange's ties with neighbouring monarchs, also menaced the Republic's autonomy, religious freedom, and economic prosperity. Down to 1688, the obligations of the House of Orange to the Stuart monarchy in England represented a particular source of menace to what Johan de Witt and his colleagues called the 'True Freedom'. In the words of the English republican, Algernon Sidney, writing around 1663, central to the pre-1688 British monarchy's ambition of 'ruining the United Provinces' was its scheme to 'make the prince of Orange master of them'.¹

Bitter wrangling and noisy bouts of internal theological and ideological warfare periodically leading to far-reaching domestic political crisis threatened to produce a marked strengthening of the monarchical element in the constitution, recurrent purges of the city governments, and increased support for the public church leading to an encroaching curtailment of religious and intellectual freedom. It was a drama built into the very fabric of the Republic and intensified by the country's relatively high levels of literacy and ardent popular support for both the public church and the House of Orange. More widely and vigorously supported by the common people than the republican oligarchy largely due to having the strongest factions within the Dutch Reformed Church, and most orthodox theologians, on their side, Orangists called into question not just the Republic in its existing form but the norms of toleration, freedom of conscience, public political debate, and freedom of expression the Dutch Revolt had given rise to.

The Orangist challenge created a political-religious-social structural trap, a fundamental quandary, from which some Dutch republicans and intellectuals felt driven to find a way out: they urgently needed to discover some means to broaden support for the 'True Freedom', the republican principle and freedom of expression, among the public by discrediting the appeal of one-man political leadership with monarchical trappings and simultaneously weakening the grip of the public church and publicly endorsed theology. It is this dilemma that explains the special characteristics of what scholars term 'the Spinozist circle', or *cercle spinoziste*, that formed during the third quarter of the century. While these intellectuals were profoundly influenced by Descartes and Hobbes, and eager to proclaim the hegemony of an all-embracing rationalist philosophy over theology and the claims of any church, it is specifically their linking the offensive against religious authority to a democratizing republicanism rejecting the political forms generally dominant in Europe that represents their principal defining feature and accounts for their decisive historical importance.

Tying their assault on 'priestcraft', their critique of the role of the clergy in shaping opinion, to a new broader democratic republicanism gave birth to the idea that 'the common best' which justifies the Republic is the sum of the individual interests of its citizens and that the purpose of the state is to serve and safeguard this secularized 'common interest'. In this way, the *cercle* for the first time closely bound together systematic rejection of religious authority on

a philosophical basis with an emphatically democratic republican tendency in political thought and constitutional theory. It is the linkage of these two principal strands that constitutes the hallmark of what historians have come to call the 'Radical Enlightenment', a movement that eventually developed into the revolutionary democratic republicanism of Tom Paine, Jefferson, Mirabeau, Condorcet, Brissot, Wolfe Tone, Georg Forster, and their allies American, British, Irish, Italian, and German as well as Dutch in the later eighteenth century.

Those comprising this *cercle spinoziste* in its formative period from the late 1650s down to the early 1670s were all highly educated, Latin-reading intellectuals who were also socially marginal types in being defectors from one or other main church, Calvinist, Lutheran, or Catholic, or in Spinoza's case from the synagogue, or else stemmed from fringe churches with a marked anti-Trinitarian character, especially the Amsterdam and Rotterdam Collegiants. The principal figures in the initial circle were Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza, the ex-Jesuit schoolmaster, Franciscus van den Enden, the ex-Lutheran physician Lodewijk Meyer, Adriaan Koerbagh (who died in prison after being incarcerated for publishing blasphemous and illicit ideas), Johannes Koerbagh (Adriaan's brother and a rejected theology candidate), Johannes Bouwmeester, Pieter de La Court (the well-known political writer and son of affluent Flemish immigrants), and the latter's brother, Johan de La Court. These men were predominantly freethinkers long steeped since their early years in Cartesianism. But Spinoza's circle also attracted philosophically minded Socinians and Anabaptists such as Jarig Jelles who wrote the preface to Spinoza's prohibited *Opera Posthuma* (1678), Jan Hendricksz Glazemaker, who translated both Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and his *Opera Posthuma* into Dutch, on occasion adding a phrase or two to the original Latin, and Jan Rieuwertsz, the Amsterdam bookseller who took the risk of clandestinely printing and selling Spinoza's works under the counter and whose bookshop served as a meeting place for the *cercle spinoziste*.

Philosophy and Group Subversion

The challenge facing Dutch Republicans down to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and William III's crossing to England and assumption of the British thrones – how to find some means to broaden support

for the Republic and more effectively confront Calvinist rigour, intolerance, and popular prejudice – proved unremitting. During the 1650s and 1660s many non-office-holding lay members of the public felt personally embroiled in this escalating ideological conflict. Spinoza's role, as the French philosopher Pierre Bayle emphasized, was principally to summarize and express an all-embracing philosophy of one-substance monism, reducing the human mind and our emotions to the same reality of determined mechanistic processes as the rest of reality, and flatly denying the existence of spirits detached from bodies, while linking this to a new conception of human freedom and religious toleration. This he did with greater cogency and incisiveness than others. But while Spinoza definitively formulated the principles shaping the radical creed philosophically, he did not in any sense 'originate' or personally forge the Radical Enlightenment. As we have seen, this was rather the result of a collective response to a continuing structural political and social crisis.

The *cercle spinoziste* was certainly not just a group epitomizing and summing up what they found in Spinoza's writings. Spinoza was the first major thinker in the modern West to present the Bible as a purely human text that is not divine Revelation and, at the same time, the first to present democracy as the most 'natural' and, on balance, the best form of government from the perspective of human freedom and well-being. But he was by no means the fiercest of the coterie in assaulting the principle of monarchy, being surpassed in this respect by Van den Enden and the brothers De La Court, or the first explicitly to tie democratic republicanism to rejection of religious authority being preceded in this respect too by Van den Enden and especially Johan de La Court. The latter's political theory was markedly more democratic than that of his more celebrated and longer-living brother, Pieter – albeit at the time of his early death he had no wish to see his work published owing to its provocative character. 'Popular government', held Johan de La Court, 'is the most natural, rational, peaceful and advantageous for its inhabitants';² this view was then adopted by Spinoza and the others. In addition, Van den Enden was the first explicitly to argue that society should be ruled by what he termed the 'common best', or '*algemeene interest*', defined as treating all citizens equally in their worldly concerns while squaring the common interest with advancing the individual's '*byzondere welstant* [particular best]' or 'interest';³ he also initiated other pertinent themes such as the topos that the Native Americans

represented a freer and more egalitarian society than that of Europe in his day.⁴ Spinoza was certainly the only major philosopher among the group; but the *cercle spinoziste* was nevertheless a two-way process. Spinoza influenced the others while also being powerfully influenced by them.

From 1666, the year of publication of Lodewijk Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, one encounters indignant complaints in the records of the Dutch Reformed provincial synods and town church councils about the clandestine penetration of radical texts and diffusion of the ideas of Spinoza and his circle. Meyer's book proclaims 'philosophy' of a strictly naturalist and rationalist type the sole valid 'interpreter' of scripture. It was a work that caused a huge commotion in academic circles and drove a deep wedge between Dutch academic Cartesianism and the radical tendency in the late 1660s. Formal complaints then increased in frequency from 1670, following the publication of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* with its notorious sixth chapter rejecting the very possibility of miracles (and revelation) – though this stance too had already been expressed earlier in Adriaan Koerbagh's chief work, *A Light Shining in Dark Places*. While there was no general States of Holland ban on either the *Philosophia* or the *Tractatus* until 1674, individual city governments, prompted by their local Reformed church councils, were certainly busily suppressing both these key texts from the outset. A week after the local church council complained to the burgomasters about the *Tractatus*' 'contents and enormities, or rather obscenities, earnestly requesting that the same be seized and suppressed', in May 1670, Leiden's bookshops were raided: all copies found were confiscated 'owing to its godless passages'.⁵ The States of Utrecht formally banned the *Tractatus* in September 1671 but again only after the city of Utrecht had already been suppressing the book for some time.⁶

Under a decree of 1678, not just Spinoza's own writings but all works containing Spinozistic ideas – that is, concepts rejecting the principles of Revelation, miracles, divine providence, redemption, and reward and punishment in the hereafter, and refusing religious authority as the basis of the moral order – were forbidden throughout the Republic under pain of severe punishment. The original *cercle spinoziste* nevertheless gradually won a handful of new acolytes and spread its influence through diffusion of clandestine manuscripts and illicit publications. During the last quarter of the century, radical thought took root in

various parts of the Republic developing into a kind of intellectual underground present in the universities and main cities with a noticeable presence in the publishing, literary, medical, and art worlds. Among notable 'Spinozists' active in the Dutch Republic in the last quarter of the Golden Age were Petrus van Balen, a heterodox Reformed preacher in Rotterdam who, in a book published in 1684, set out to reaffirm in a more accessible manner Spinoza's theory of true and false ideas and his system of logic; Abraham Johannes Cuffeler, a jurist and amateur philosopher in The Hague; Frederik van Leenhof, a heterodox Reformed preacher at Zwolle; the Deventer Huguenot schoolmaster Simon Tyssot de Patot, stripped of his job and expelled from that city in 1726; and the Amsterdam bookseller Aert Wolsgryn, arrested in 1698 for writing part of, and illicitly selling, the clandestine Spinozistic philosophical novel *The Life of Philopater* (1697).

Wolsgryn was sentenced to a 4,000 guilder fine and eight years' imprisonment to be followed by perpetual banishment from Holland. If Cuffeler's *Specimen artis ratiocinandi* (3 vols., 'Hamburg' [Amsterdam], 1684) was the most substantial addition to the Dutch radical corpus in Latin after Spinoza's death in 1677, *Philopater* was certainly the vernacular text reflecting the radical tendency that did most to spread Spinozistic ideas outside academic and intellectual circles. It was banned by the States of Friesland in January 1698 as a book in which belief in God and the 'divine authorship of Holy Scripture are destroyed'.⁷

The Huguenot Dimension

Radical ideas diffused gradually but increasingly, through various clandestine coterie. Among the most important of these were heterodox Huguenot refugees in Holland who came into contact with Spinoza's ideas and combined these with strands of Hobbes, Bayle, and other writers and took to concocting an outspokenly irreligious and sometimes distinctly bizarre underground philosophical literature in French which flourished from the later 1670s, especially in Amsterdam and The Hague, but also in other places, circulating both as forbidden printed texts and clandestine manuscripts. Gabriel de Saint-Glain and Jean-Maximilien Lucas were among the pioneers of this trend. In the 1720s, reportedly, intellectual opinion was divided as to whether it was

Saint-Glain or Lucas who had prepared the banned 1678 French translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* which includes some thirty pages of supplementary notes, taken from Spinoza's own manuscripts, which were not to be found in the existing published Latin editions, a text ever since frequently seized by the royal police in France. Saint-Glain, a minor nobleman living in Holland since the 1660s, had reportedly known Spinoza personally and been among his '*plus grands admirateurs*'. He was a staunch anti-monarchist who later proved willing to become one of William III's writers of anti-absolutist and anti-Louis XIV propaganda owing to the mounting scale of the threat posed by Louis XIV's monarchy.

Lucas was the probable author of the first published biography of Spinoza, *La Vie de Spinoza* (c. 1678) and possibly the author of the *Treatise of the Three Impostors* (c. 1680?) (*Traité des Trois Imposteurs*), also known as the *L'Esprit de Spinoza*, which later became the most notorious and widely circulated of all the clandestine philosophical manuscripts in Europe during the last part of the Dutch Golden Age.⁸ Other key figures in this largely Huguenot radical milieu were Tyssot de Patot at Deventer; Nicolas Gueudeville, a French political and religious fugitive who dedicated his journalism and career to opposing Louis XIV, exalting the Dutch Republic, and fighting for a better regime in France; and Charles Levier (d. 1735), a bookseller at The Hague deemed '*extrêmement infatué du système de Spinoza*', who appended some notes about Spinoza's writings to his underground 1719 edition, the first printed version, of the *Traité des Trois Imposteurs*.

The way radical thought spread in the later Dutch Golden Age reveals that Spinozism, while still a technical philosophy formulated in Latin, addressed to the learned and intended to reform Cartesianism, and locked in vehement conflict with academic Cartesians, had now also, more importantly, become a practical guide – as it had incipiently been earlier for figures such as the brothers Koerbagh and Bouwmeester – as to how to live a wise, contented life and nurture a rational politics geared to the worldly benefit of everyone. No one summed up these practical goals, reaffirming 'Spinozism' as a manner of life and path to happiness with overtones of neo-Stoicism and neo-Epicureanism, more eloquently and effectively than Van Leenhof, a heterodox Reformed preacher of marked republican and anti-monarchical leanings already under suspicion of holding unorthodox views while preaching in Zeeland in the 1670s but who underwent

something like a private conversion to Spinoza's philosophy, through reading and discussion, specifically in 1684. For most of his career until his public disgrace and expulsion from the Reformed Church in 1712, he preached at Zwolle. Van Leenhof's most notorious publication, *Heaven on Earth (Den Hemel op Aarden), Or a short and clear Account of the true and firm happiness* (Zwolle, 1703), nowhere mentions Spinoza and makes no overt reference to his doctrines but was immediately recognized by contemporaries as suffused throughout with a Spinozistic approach to life, to the Bible (here deemed purely a work of 'imagination', not literal truth), to church-going, and to politics, presenting what has been called 'a kind of blueprint of a happy Dutch Republic'.⁹

Saving Men from Tyranny Fed on 'Superstition'

The pronounced early anti-Orangism and (from 1688) anti-monarchism of Dutch radical thought needed to be modified somewhat after 1672 when the danger posed by Louis XIV's efforts to establish French royal hegemony in Europe became the principal threat facing the Dutch Republic and it emerged that, in the changed circumstances of the 1670s, the prince of Orange offered the only realistic hope, politically and militarily, of preserving the Republic's independence, commerce, and prosperity. By 1688, Dutch radical thought, while still fiercely anti-absolutist and anti-monarchical on one level, had discarded its former anti-Orangism and become willing to fuse its assault on religious authority and antipathy to the closed urban oligarchies dominating the provincial States with the concept of 'mixed government' – a stable combination of monarchy with republicanism such as evolved after 1672 in the United Provinces and was introduced into England by means of a domestic revolution triggered by Dutch military invasion, in 1688.

Shortly after 1688, an additional major new ingredient was also absorbed into the Dutch radical tendency, arising from the unprecedented public furore surrounding the book *De betoverde Weereldt* (*The World Bewitched*, 2 vols., 1691–3) by the Frisian preacher Balthasar Bekker (1634–98), a systematic philosophical denial, based on Cartesian arguments, of the reality of magic, witchcraft, and demons. Bekker was not himself actually a radical in the sense defined here, but a Cartesian Reformed theologian who, however, arrived at highly problematic views

about the restricted possibility of supernatural happenings in the world that were generally condemned by churchmen and came to be predominantly associated with radical freethinkers and radical denial of the reality of all supernatural forces, events, and powers.

One of the key Dutch apologists for William III's invasion of England and for the Glorious Revolution, Ericus Walten, a misfit possibly of German origin expelled from Utrecht in 1685 for vagrancy, was at the same time Bekker's most vehement defender in print. Walten's chief political text, *De regtsinnige Policy* (*The Orthodox Policy*, The Hague, 1689), adopted the anti-Hobbesian, Spinozist idea that the essential freedoms man possesses in the state of nature continue intact but now in a modified, formalized fashion in society after the contract setting up rule by government. In a letter to Jelles, Spinoza had summed up the basic difference between Hobbes and himself by saying 'that I always preserve the natural right in its entirety'; and this remained a key distinguishing feature of 'Spinozist' political thought.¹⁰ Walten's constitutional doctrines centred around sovereignty of the people, the need to represent the people's interests, and the right of resistance to unjust and tyrannical government where such resistance is legitimized by a representative body. These political doctrines he combined not just with Bekkerism and attacking belief in witchcraft and demons but with a Spinozistic approach to Bible criticism denying the legitimacy of religious authority in society and politics. Carried away by his own rhetoric, he went so far as to designate the Dutch Reformed Church 'a madhouse, or hospital of fools'.¹¹ Arrested for impiety and insulting the Reformed Church in 1694, he died in prison (from which William III made no attempt to extricate him), seemingly by suicide, three years later.

Two more notable defenders of Bekker and Bekkerism in print were the antiquarian, critic, writer on art, and bookseller Willem Goeree and the Dordrecht artist and art critic, Arnold Houbraken, both prominent in the Dutch art world during the later Dutch Golden Age. Both figured among the boldest radical writers of the era, though neither acquired the notoriety of Romeyn de Hooghe, the greatest engraver of the later Dutch Golden Age, who became widely known as a libertine and 'scoffer at God and his Holy Word'.¹² De Hooghe, another apologist for William III for a time, sought in several political pamphlets to combine a modified Orangism with an anti-oligarchic republican political theory which he aimed especially at what he saw as a tyrannical Amsterdam

regent clique seeking to turn themselves into Venetian *signori*. De Hooghe was certainly a freethinker and libertine but is often considered a mere opportunist: how far his main political text, the *Spiegel van staat* (*Mirror of State*, 1706), voicing the post-1702 reaction against the 'mixed government principle', genuinely reflects the radical tendency described here remains a matter for further debate.

Goeree, by contrast, was an active art dealer with connections throughout the Netherlands and an earnest, consistent reputation for anti-Orangism in politics and anti-Calvinism in theology. The latter he acquired during the noisy furore in Zeeland, in 1676, when William III ejected the anti-Orangist Cocceian preacher Wilhelmus Momma from Middelburg. Houbraken, another undoubted radical foe of religious authority, was the author of the *Groote Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen* (*The Great Theatre of Dutch Painters and Women Painters*, 3 vols., Amsterdam, 1718–21), a compendium that has been described as the 'first extensive study made of the lives and works of seventeenth-century Netherlandish painters'.¹³ Besides promoting radical ideas, Goeree and Houbraken figured prominently among the – no more than twelve – writers active between 1600 and 1750 who can be said to have written 'extensively' on Dutch Golden Age art.

Goeree not only defended Bekker in print but ventured to criticize the prevailing taboo against Spinozistic ideas, claiming that, in the Netherlands in his time, Spinoza's ideas were not being fairly considered. He characterizes Spinoza's goal as having been to dislodge from the minds of 'both Jews and Christians all grounding of true religion and belief and make known that religion was invented merely for political reasons, that is to keep society in tranquillity and the people under government'. Spinoza had already set out on this quest, he records, in that 'unknown work', the *De Jure Ecclesiasticorum* (*On Church Law*, 1665), one of the earliest publications of the *cercle spinoziste*, nowadays considered by scholars to be the work of Spinoza's friend and ally, Lodewijk Meyer. Spinoza's ideas, holds Goeree, echoing Cuffeler, one must retrieve from his books 'and not prattle about them too much before having studied them thoroughly; which few perhaps have done properly'.¹⁴ This last was a hint that Goeree believed that more readers should examine Spinoza's writings for themselves and that he thought he himself had studied Spinoza carefully whereas those loudly condemning him mostly had not. Due to people's borrowing their views too readily from others, he contends, many had 'all too rashly' assumed

Spinoza to be a muddle-head. Such a superficial reading and such criticism were reprehensible.

Bekker and Van Leenhof are extolled as true heroes by both Houbraken and Goeree. It was central to their radical ideology that man has achieved considerable progress and done so (at any rate since the Reformation) through crucial advances in knowledge. Hence, in 'our days' there has been a 'complete demolition of pagan superstition which until now kept the world enchanted'.¹⁵ The consequence of the latest advances in uncluttering men's minds – and hence support for figures such as Bekker and Van Leenhof in lay society was that *'alle waarheid eindelijk openbaar wordt* [all truth finally is becoming publicly available]' and readily accessible. A key point for them was that it was erudition, philosophy, and science diffused in the vernacular, not least by the likes of Goeree and Houbraken themselves, that were accomplishing the work of dispelling imposture and enlightening the world and had done so in a positive and unstoppable manner. To their minds, art and artists had helped in accomplishing this task and were supporting philosophy and science.

Like Houbraken, Goeree in his published texts verges on excluding the supernatural and all notion of the divine as separate from nature altogether. The Ten Plagues to him were not a miraculous occurrence but something explicable in terms of purely natural causes. In the case of the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, he discreetly appears not to entirely rule out the possibility of supernatural intervention but, following Meyer, Spinoza, and Adriaan Koerbagh, insisted that any responsible commentator on that 'miracle' must, before invoking the supernatural, research the likelihood of earth tremors, the role of shallows, and movement of tides, and exhaustively examine every conceivable natural explanation. Superstition and belief in demons and sorcery Goeree ranked among the worst curses afflicting humanity, manipulative priesthoods having regularly exploited popular credulity, demonology, and idolatry to enhance their illicit sway and to exact obedience. 'Why', he asks, 'did the Saviour not vigorously combat and contradict all these gross errors?' Regrettably, he observed, Christ himself 'sometimes used phrases accommodating the teaching of demons and power of possession'. Against the background of his consistent anti-Trinitarianism, this remark savours of Spinoza's idea that Christ and his Apostles, using phrases exploiting the credulous beliefs of the common people, were purely concerned to instil 'obedience' to the moral code,

while remaining largely unconcerned with the work of teaching and enlightening men, which to Goeree and Houbraken chiefly meant uncluttering their minds of superstition and credulous belief and propagating 'truth'.¹⁶

Goeree and Houbraken repeatedly lament that Christ and the Apostles made no attempt to counter the superstitious beliefs of the people of their time especially regarding demonology. One of the chief features of, but also obstacles to, Dutch radical thought from the outset was its hostility to popular notions, what it viewed as the unthinking, uncritical way in which ordinary people had supposedly allowed themselves to be blindly and slavishly misled by the clergy and other elites. The exploitation and drudgery to which the unprivileged were subjected were viewed by them as the inevitable result of 'superstition', 'credulity', and 'ignorance'. Overcoming this barrier, they argued, required an enlightening process to re-educate the people; but inevitably doubts lingered as to the viability of this generalized solution. The main objective of the preface to Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670) had been to establish a clear dependency between the need to demolish 'superstition' and the formidably difficult task of combating tyranny. When seeking to change a despotic regime into a better one, the number one priority, held Spinoza, is to defeat 'credulity' and 'superstition'. Failure here means there is no point in even trying to fight despotism; the only result would be to make society the victim of the fanatical and 'ignorant', thereby ensuring even worse tyranny.¹⁷

Here, then, is the principal reason why Dutch radical thought's prime defining feature was its denouncing political oppression and religious authority linked together. And here too was the sticking point for Pierre Bayle, who was ready to endorse radical toleration, and separate philosophy and theology, and faith from reason, as emphatically as Spinoza, but unwilling to entrust society to the safekeeping of the multitude or adopt the democratic stance characterizing the radical tradition. It was a notable point of disagreement, for example, between Bayle and Gueudeville. Gueudeville agreed with Bayle (who opposed his friend's revolutionary attitude) that it is useless to fight tyranny if men continue in their usual state of ignorance: the result is indeed merely slaughter and rivers of blood; but where men are brought to 'open their eyes' to their blindness and '*faire revivre parmi eux l'esprit de liberté*', as he expressed it, in his opposition journal, *L'Esprit des cours de l'Europe*, if they

become enlightened about the human predicament, then they can justly and usefully take up arms and fight for and secure a better form of government.¹⁸ Gueudeville stands out in the history of Dutch radical thought during the later Golden Age also for turning Van den Enden's idea that the Native Americans represented a more egalitarian and equitable society than that of Europe into a full-blown anti-colonial discourse.

Reforming Lifestyle and Sexuality

Hostility to religious authority and broadly radical leanings were apt to include, even among those with no training in formal philosophy, an explicit antipathy to the conventional anti-Spinozism saturating majority Dutch culture from the late 1660s onwards. Goeree was moved to aver that those few who seriously studied Spinoza's philosophy 'say that he offers many good things, and in many sections has even improved on Descartes; though to say this today seems to be forbidden language'.¹⁹ Here he was also alluding to the then current Van Leenhof furore, a public scandal almost matching the uproar over Bekker, in which the Zwolle preacher was reproached among other things for suggesting that in Spinoza's writings good as well as bad things are to be found and that a valuable aspect, especially of his *Ethics*, is his unrivalled analysis of how human emotions work and determine outward expression and behaviour. This he considered a topic of great relevance to everyone and perhaps especially artists, art critics, and art students who were exhorted by both Goeree and Houbraken to render facial expression and gestures, and *houding* (posture), in their paintings, drawings, and engravings so as to reflect emotion, motive, and intention powerfully and accurately. Goeree's *Kerkelijke en wereldlijke historie* (*Church and Worldly History*, Amsterdam, 1705) – which suspiciously included an engraved portrait of Spinoza and which many years later was quietly reprinted at Leiden, in 1730 – initiated a new phase in the long-standing radical encounter with the Reformed synods and preachers. At gatherings of the South Holland Synod, in 1706, and again at the meeting at Leerdam, in July 1707, Church delegates complained about the art dealer's latest outpouring of irreverence and theological subversion wherein, just as in his earlier '*Mosaische Oudheden*' (*Mosaic Antiquities*) 'many shocking and offensive passages are to be found, in which the views of Bekker are

boldly and forthrightly, indeed even more vilely upheld [than before]' and the Church's official proceedings against Bekker openly mocked.²⁰

Radical thought equally came to be associated with sexually libertarian attitudes, and not without reason. During the late 1670s and early 1680s, Dutch contemporaries grew accustomed to linking the name of the erotic writer Adrianus Beverland (1650–1716) with those of Spinoza and Koerbagh, writers to whom Beverland himself several times refers, on one occasion gracing Koerbagh with the epithet 'Amstelodamensis ille Thales Milesius', implying that he was the initiator of the new 'Amsterdam philosophy'. Beverland's Bible criticism follows Hobbes and Spinoza in systematically questioning the notion that scripture is divine revelation and has reached us in a pure and uncorrupted state. Mostly, Beverland's Bible exegesis merely affirms the text's defective character and stresses the affinity of biblical allegories, especially the story of Adam and Eve, with pagan religious myths concerning the origins of humanity. Like other radicals, Beverland believed theologians had systematically misconstrued scripture's content for their own purposes, in their own interest, and at great cost to human society. The account of the Fall in Genesis, he maintained, must be interpreted allegorically and as erotically charged. Spinozism was viewed by him, as by other radicals, as a means to free people from the psychological oppression and feelings of guilt foisted on them by theological doctrines which the devout trustingly believe in, but which have no basis in reality and are used to exploit them, and can readily be shown to be false through use of philosophical reason.²¹

Beverland's kinship to Spinoza is further reflected in his naturalistic conception that the whole of reality forms a single, unified extension and that everything pertains to and is subject to nature under the same immutable laws. For Beverland, no disembodied spirits exist, although he coyly refrains from acknowledging that he agreed with them when remarking, in his notorious *De Peccato Originali* (*On Original Sin*, 1678), that the 'Sadducees, Enthusiasts and Hobbes ... deny the life of angels and the existence of demons.'²² Materialistic monism Beverland combined with a totalizing opposition to all existing structures and pretensions of spiritual authority. The erotic drive infusing all of life and nature is not, in his view, the highest or even any kind of good but just the fundamental drive motivating all living creatures. Ostensibly dismissing Spinoza and Vanini as 'impostors' and atheists, in the 1679 version of his book, he

styles Spinoza a 'veritable offspring of Lucian' since 'from the principles of Hobbes, he acknowledged no kind of God other than the fixed order of nature, or the fate-bound interconnection of natural things' – seemingly negative wording presumably intended to deflect the accusation that he was a 'Spinozist' himself. Beverland associates Hobbes with Spinoza, Koerbagh, and Van den Enden when further on referring to Esdras having redacted the Pentateuch many centuries after Moses 'ut cum Hobbesio suo impie ratiocinator Ceurbachii commilito et Johannis van den Eynde discipulus, bis terve notatus ille Spinosa [as expounds in an impious manner, like his Hobbes, that comrade of Koerbagh, and disciple of Johan [*sic*] van den Enden, that already two or three times mentioned Spinoza]'.²³

Radicals aimed to break theological sway over life and thought and proclaim independence of judgement and criticism. For Beverland this included promoting the sexual emancipation of the individual, Original Sin in his estimation being a wholly false theological doctrine that had unjustifiably burdened men and women with guilt for millennia. The biblical story of the Fall was just a primitive allegory about sexual desire: far from being religious truth, it was just priestly imposture, a theologians' deception practised on the common people. His Spinozism Beverland absorbed evidently partly through reading but also through moving in freethinking circles, especially in The Hague during the later 1670s, close to Van Balen and perhaps Spinoza himself. Van Balen, noted the The Hague physician, Cornelis Bontekoe, had been lured to perdition by Spinoza and 'the Devil', adding that Spinoza exerted his deplorable influence not only on Van Balen 'but in the same way also on many in our land whom I shall not all name, although I am acquainted with many of them; and the well-known Hadrianus Beverland recently sentenced at Leiden for his godless writings is also one of that lot, as he has openly shown both by word of mouth and in print'.²⁴ Troubled by the fact that Spinoza had originally gained a public reputation in the Netherlands and beyond, in the early and mid 1660s as an expounder and reformer of 'Cartesianism', Dr Bontekoe bitterly rebuked an anti-Cartesian opponent at The Hague for trying to pin the blame for the 'the Godforsaken Spinoza and his notorious disciples, the damned Beverland, the apostate P.v.B[alen] and other such ... on the Cartesians'.²⁵ In reality it was Satan who 'brought his Spinoza into the play, disguised as a Cartesian, to betray the Cartesians thereby, as the outcome has shown'.²⁶

Dutch Radicalism in the Rise of Western Modernity

Combining rejection of religious authority with a democratizing republicanism underpinned by a naturalistic morality was the key defining feature of the Dutch new radicalism. Other notable radical strands of the wider Western clandestine radical underground originated further back in the tradition of *libertinage érudit* or late medieval Averroism, in the rediscovery of Lucretius in fifteenth-century Florence, and the new mathematical-scientific rigour of Galileo. *Theophrastus Redivivus*, the foremost mid-seventeenth-century clandestine manuscript, dating from 1659 and probably composed in France, offered a pre-Spinozist ‘philosophical atheism’ that certainly encompassed some components of the subsequent radical tradition. Separating morality from belief in God and from religion, and eliminating divine providence, this text likewise locates the ‘true’ moral order exclusively in nature and the needs of society and declares its social values to be morally superior to those proclaimed by revealed religion. But in other respects the *Theophrastus* diverges from the ‘Radical Enlightenment’ tendency that first arose in Holland in the 1650s and 1660s. Thus, while claiming that injustice reigns on earth, and using this as an argument against belief in God, the *Theophrastus*, like Epicureanism generally, remained mainly preoccupied with individual attitudes, states of mind, and moral development without explicitly assailing the existing social and political order. The *Theophrastus* evinces nothing of the confrontational republican and reformist politics characteristic of Van den Enden, Koerbagh, the brothers De la Court, Bouwmeester, Meyer, Walten, Beverland, Wolsgryn, Goeree, and Van Leenhof. Furthermore, the *Theophrastus*’ neo-Epicureanism neither challenged absolute monarchy’s unrestricted power nor registered a plea for liberty of expression and toleration. Liberty of thought and individual expression for society as a whole simply do not figure as plausible or attainable goals as they do among the *cercle spinoziste* and what Bontekoe calls the ‘Spinosistische Beverlandisten’ of the 1680s and 1690s. Nor does the pre-1650 neo-Epicurean clandestine philosophical undercurrent evoke any sense of philosophical-scientific ‘reason’ being an advancing force enlightening men by attacking and eventually overcoming ‘ignorance’, ‘superstition’, religious authority, and tyranny. On the contrary, it evinced a distinctly sceptical tendency not just with respect to belief, theology, and religion but also towards scholarship and science.²⁷

Spinoza was by no means the only major philosopher elements of whose thought helped construct the new radical philosophical vision and concoct the new clandestine philosophical literature which during the eighteenth century exerted a decisive impact in different ways on the so-called English deists – the most radical of whom, Toland and Collins, scholars today increasingly recognize as standing close to Spinoza on the most basic points in their thought – and Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert, Helvétius, Condorcet, and other eighteenth-century *philosophes*. Between 1650 and 1700, the influence of Hobbes, Descartes, and Bayle was undoubtedly also highly significant. However, it was Spinoza in particular who forged a system consciously and systematically undermining religious authority and all notion of the world and human history being governed by a knowing divine force, benevolent or otherwise. Removing divine providence more explicitly and cogently than the others, he and his circle stepped crucially beyond ancient and early modern Epicureanism by inseparably connecting their assault on religious authority to democratizing republicanism, a coupling wholly lacking previously (and in Hobbes) while, like Descartes, simultaneously adopting Galileo's mathematical science as the overriding verifying principle of philosophical theory applied to all worldly matters. At the same time, they broadened Descartes' intellectual revolution so that in their world-view the precise criteria of Galilean science should be applied to everything, leaving no area whatsoever reserved for *supernaturalia* and the purely spiritual (as in Descartes).

For the later Dutch Golden Age, the 'relevance of early Dutch Spinozism' from a strictly intellectual point of view doubtless 'seems limited, especially in comparison to Dutch Cartesianism';²⁸ but below the surface, in underground opposition culture and political thought and in its long-term implications for the modern West, Dutch Spinozism's significance was arguably significantly greater than that of Cartesianism. In 1799, the Harderwijk professor Bernard Nieuhoff remarked that 'earlier many men were Spinozists in secret', though historians, it should be noted, mostly doubt that Spinozism continued to exert much influence in Holland after around 1720. Even so, it is only by noting the long-term importance of his key innovations in philosophy that one can explain why it was that what was generally referred to as 'Spinoza' and 'Spinozism' in eighteenth-century Europe retained far greater resonance and

rhetorical clout in the major intellectual and religious controversies of the era than the names of Epicurus, Lucretius, Averroes, Hobbes, Sidney, or Bayle; Spinoza's name had a more comprehensively challenging and (for most) menacing significance than all these others, consistently all the way from 1660 until 1848. Admittedly, 'Epicurus' and 'Hobbes' played a not dissimilar rhetorical role in anti-radical polemics at certain times, but only 'Spinoza' and 'Spinozism' were routinely deployed by theologians, by academic philosophers, and by both moderate and counter-Enlighteners to assail irreligious and naturalistic foes of the existing order everywhere and throughout the entire period down to the early nineteenth century.

Notes

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11. '[E]en Sottenhuys of Gasthuys van de gekken': Van Gelderen, 'In Defense of William III', 149; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, 144–7.
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22. Beverland, *De peccato Originali* (1679), 6.
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26. Bontekoe, *Brief Aen Johan Frederik Swetzer*, 20.
27. N. Gengoux, *Un athéisme philosophique à l'âge classique. Le Theophrastus redivivus (1659)*, 2 vols., Paris, 2014, vol. II, 767–79.
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Epilogue: The Legacy of the Dutch Golden Age

To appreciate the legacy of the Dutch Golden Age, one does not need to travel very far. Across the world – from London and Moscow to Melbourne and New York – museums hold extensive collections of seventeenth-century Dutch art. Indeed, the majority of surviving works by Rembrandt and Vermeer are to be found outside the current Netherlands. This remarkable global distribution, somewhat similar to the diffusion of Italian Renaissance art, started early. Princes and connoisseurs throughout early modern Europe collected landscapes, still lifes, and genre paintings from the United Provinces. Catherine the Great of Russia, for one, enthusiastically expanded the tsarist holdings, turning St Petersburg into one of the largest storerooms of Dutch masters up until the present-day. The greatest sell-off, however, happened in the nineteenth century. Confronted with debts, the heirs of King William II decided to send the royal collection of paintings to auction in 1850. Virtually all lots, including iconic pieces by Rembrandt, Hobbema, and Ruysdael went to foreign buyers, eventually ending up on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City), the Hermitage (St Petersburg), and the Wallace Collection (London). The Dutch state did not deem it its responsibility to purchase these treasures, nor did individual Dutch citizens. It is telling that in 1860 the city of Delft disposed of its collection of sixteenth-century pictures in a similar fashion. Two decades later, the trustees of Haarlem's Beresteyn Hof sought to end their financial troubles by selling three portraits, supposedly by Frans Hals, to the Louvre in Paris. This apparent indifference towards the artistic heritage of the Golden Age led the Berlin museum director Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929) to



Figure 20.1 Johannes Vermeer, *Milkmaid*, c. 1660.

conclude that the majority of private painting collections in the Netherlands had been ‘flogged off’ during his lifetime.¹

All the same, the nineteenth-century exodus of Dutch art also triggered two unanticipated responses that would shape the modern legacy of the Golden Age. In the Netherlands, the disappearance of numerous artworks encouraged the development of a critical counter-movement, generally associated with Victor de Stuers’ call in 1873 to save Dutch heritage for the nation. By the end of the century, and particularly after the opening of the Rijksmuseum in 1885, the seventeenth-century past became an instrument for the Dutch to re-invent themselves as a proud

nation, with a great history, enduring values, and fitting colonial claims. Outside the Netherlands, meanwhile, the popularity of Dutch Old Masters contributed to a growing fascination for Dutch culture more generally. Strikingly realistic and full of suggestive meanings, seventeenth-century pictures seemed to offer uncomplicated access to a distant society whose taste and moral values were suitably modern. In the famous words of art critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger (1807–69), the works of Vermeer and his contemporaries were to be regarded as ‘a sort of photography’ (Figure 20.1).² Particularly in the United States, the appetite for this early modern pictorial realism fuelled and channelled a sense of patriotic identification. Although the Dutch presence in seventeenth-century North America had been rather limited, some American scholars now claimed that Holland, and not Britain, had been the cradle of the free, tolerant, and enterprising spirit of the American republic. In 1903, the editor of the popular *Ladies’ Home Journal* characteristically stated that the Netherlands was ‘The Mother of America’.³ Thus, as the galleries in Europe and the United States became filled with Golden Age art, pictures turned from windows to the past into mirrors through which contemporaries viewed themselves.

The Myth of Modernity

Art has been a stimulus as well as a hindrance in the scholarship of the Dutch Golden Age and assessments of its long-term impact. Behind the non-verbal medium of painting quickly loomed the positivist spectre of an anticipated modernity. Although the iconographical turn in art historical scholarship has long shown the limits of this reading, the Dutch Republic continues to be described by scholars as a driver of innovation and even modernity in Europe. As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, historians have linked the rise of capitalism, the ascendancy of bourgeois values, the invention of religious tolerance, and the advent of globalization to the Dutch Golden Age. In each case this supposed agency has also been subject to intense debate. What is more, different generations of scholars have stressed particular legacies, following their own preferences. Thus, in the imperialist mood of the late nineteenth century, the lasting effects of Dutch global expansion were highlighted, whereas the economic recovery after the Second World War triggered interest in the origins of liberal capitalism. In the later

twentieth century, coping with diversity and migration turned into popular areas of scholarship as European societies themselves changed as a result of immigration. It is telling that topics such as the Dutch engagement with military innovation have received far less scrutiny: these types of 'legacy' did not sit well with the cherished image of the modern Netherlands as an open, peace-loving society.

This highly selective and shifting scholarly focus reveals the pitfalls in assessing the long-term influence and continuing relevance of this much studied era in European history. Are references to the Golden Age by later generations indeed evidence of its 'impact' or rather proof of anachronistic frames and particular discursive strategies? And yet finding answers to such questions is not bound to fail. The very use of the concept of the Dutch Golden Age as a frame of reference – in the Netherlands and beyond – can actually teach us a great deal about how men and women interpret developments of their own time and justify their actions. In trying to capture these different types of impact, this Epilogue will focus on three key areas in which discussions about the Golden Age's legacy – real or imagined – have been particularly profound: politics, social conditions, and the economy.

Political Models

The Dutch state originated from war. While the foundation of an independent, republican polity was the unintended outcome of the rebellion against Habsburg rule, the emergence of the United Provinces quickly became a source of inspiration for later revolutionary movements. During the civil wars in the British Isles (1642–49), radical English parliamentarians regularly pointed to the powerful precedent (and the subsequent success) of the Netherlands. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) John Milton drew suggestive parallels between the recent execution of King Charles I and the abjuration of Philip II in 1581. Forty years later, political and economic changes brought about by the Glorious Revolution were said to echo Dutch examples. The Whig party, who resisted King James II's dealings with the Catholic Louis XIV of France and his supposedly universal monarchical designs, viewed the Dutch Republic as the defender of Protestantism and (parliamentarian) liberty. A number of measures that were taken under the government of the new, Dutch-born King William III, notably the Toleration Act (1689)

and the foundation of the Bank of England (1694), indeed bore Dutch influence. Copying policy coincided with a growing popularity of Dutch architecture and painting in England. Some other innovations of the 1680s, including the introduction of street lighting, were a Dutch import, too. Lisa Jardine has therefore claimed that the global rise of Britain after 1689 should be understood in the context of its clever 'plundering of Holland's glory'.⁴

The revolutionary spirit of the eighteenth century fuelled a renewed interest in the origins and characteristics of the Dutch state. Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) argued that the Dutch Revolt had been a great watershed event in European history: for the first time, freedom had triumphed over tyranny in ways others might emulate. French and especially American revolutionaries indeed referred to the Dutch conflict when justifying their actions. In 1781, John Adams described the American Revolution as a 'transcript' of the revolt of the United Provinces.⁵ Adams' bold statement has sparked a lively debate about specific connections between the Dutch Act of Abjuration of 1581 and the American Declaration of Independence of 1776. There are some striking similarities between the argumentative structure of the two texts: the elaborate list of grievances against the monarch, followed by references to unsuccessful attempts to seek redress for these grievances, leading to the conclusion that revolt is permitted. Further evidence of rhetorical adaptation may be found in later statements by the Declaration's chief author, Thomas Jefferson, who 'did not consider it as any part of [his] charge to invent new ideas altogether, and to offer no sentiment which had ever been expressed before'.⁶ Still, such exercises in comparative and intertextual analysis also bring out the notable differences between the two texts. Grown out of a conservative rebellion against Habsburg political reform, the Dutch Act sought to abjure Philip II in order to replace him with a new sovereign. The American Declaration, by contrast, proposed an entirely new polity, based on a set of revolutionary values. Rather than a prototype to emulate, the Act of Abjuration seems to have functioned as one of many intellectual resources that were adjusted to fit the ideals of eighteenth-century revolutionaries.

What is more, the political legacy of the Dutch Republic was more ambiguous than the approving claims of Friedrich Schiller and John Adams suggest. The United Provinces equally served as an ominous example to later generations. As David Onnekink's chapter in this volume points out, particularly in the nineteenth century the

administrative structure of the Dutch Republic received a bad press from historians and politicians alike. Its incoherent, decentralized, and seemingly inefficient institutions were widely seen as unfortunate remnants of medieval times, which had prevented the Netherlands from developing into a strong, unified nation-state. Dutch politics, it appeared, was as much grounded in outdated forms of political and social corporatism as in accidental innovations brought about by the Revolt. From the later twentieth century, this mixed political culture was viewed in a more positive light. J. L. Price, for example, has suggested that it enabled the United Provinces to accommodate dissident voices better than many of its monarchical rivals. With the rising popularity of 'consensual politics', several scholars and politicians claimed that the Dutch Republic had laid the foundations of an enduring culture of negotiation, accommodation, and compromise in the Netherlands. According to this line of thought, the Golden Age had been instrumental in advancing the *poldermodel* and Dutch variants to 'third way politics' – popular catchphrases in the 1990s and early 2000s.⁷ In this way, the Golden Age era remained a touchstone through which the Dutch and foreign observers viewed the origins of civil society in the Netherlands.

Social Conditions

If the political legacy of the Dutch Republic offered an ambivalent model, its social fabric seemed to have produced more straightforward effects. A sense of egalitarianism, religious tolerance, and bourgeois values have long been seen as chief characteristics and lasting consequences of the Golden Age. In his seminal book *The Embarrassment of Riches*, Simon Schama claimed that the 'moral geography' of the seventeenth century continues to characterize the modern Netherlands.⁸ Its advanced welfare infrastructures supposedly paved the way for twentieth-century variants of the Dutch welfare state. The idea that tolerance was somehow rooted in early modern Dutch society enabled twentieth-century commentators to explain liberal attitudes such as policies on soft drugs, euthanasia, and gay marriage that typified the pragmatic political climate in the Netherlands of their times. Perhaps more than in any other sphere of influence, genre painting has served to confirm and reinforce the impression of an egalitarian, bourgeois society. Still, the

listing of these suggestive parallels relied on a highly selective reading of an imagined national past. As the chapters of Charles Parker and Christine Kooi demonstrate, seventeenth-century attitudes towards religious diversity were highly pragmatic, and toleration practices were grounded in local and shifting concerns. A centuries-long continuity in mentality is equally difficult to prove. After all, few historians would describe the Netherlands of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as inherently progressive, open, and tolerant.

Outside the Netherlands, the continuing social relevance of the Dutch Golden Age has been debated in a rather different context. Some nineteenth-century Americans, looking for the origins of their morals and beliefs, found them in Dutch paintings that seemed to reflect their republican, democratic, and meritocratic ideals. John Motley (1814–77) underscored the idea of a republican predecessor to the United States by reminding his readers that the Dutch too had established a republican Protestant nation that had abolished popery and absolute monarchical rule. He suitably framed William of Orange as the George Washington of the sixteenth century. Such narratives neatly fitted American self-images at the time that the United States was experiencing large-scale immigration from eastern and central Europe, which many saw as a threat to established American values.⁹ The Dutch love of ‘freedom’ furthered this affinity, even though seventeenth-century understandings of freedom(s) were quite different from nineteenth-century ones. While such simplified historical parallels lost much of their appeal in the twentieth century, in recent years a renewed debate has emerged about the role of the Dutch Republic in shaping ‘Western’ Enlightenment values. Jonathan Israel has pointed to the vibrant intellectual climate of the Golden Age, which bred radical secular views and transformed Western thinking in the following centuries.¹⁰ Just at the time that the importance of the Enlightenment is passionately debated in Europe and America, Baruch de Spinoza and his circle emerge as the new lasting heirs of the Dutch Golden Age.

Economics

Dutch economic progress was already attracting attention and admirers in the seventeenth century. Puzzled by Holland’s achievements in shipping, industry, and global trade, Sir William Temple recorded, ‘we are

still as much to seek what it is that makes people industrious in one Countrey, and idle in another'.¹¹ Emulating Dutch policies and innovations became popular among many early modern governments. Tsar Peter the Great of Russia spent extensive time in the harbours of Amsterdam and made use of his impressions in building his model city of St Petersburg. At the same time, governments of surrounding countries, notably France and Britain, sought to impose protectionist measures that served to sabotage Dutch successes in overseas trade. Both strategies contributed to the gradual economic decline of the United Provinces in the eighteenth century. Still, both admirers and critics would later regard the corporate, mercantile character of the Dutch economy as the cradle of modern capitalism. In *Das Kapital* (1867), Karl Marx viewed the Dutch Republic as the ominous catalyst of industrial bourgeois society, which advanced social-economic inequalities and colonial exploitation. Other economic historians have been more reluctant in their assessment, pointing out that the Dutch may have been innovative in the integration of trade, industry, and agriculture, but that they somehow failed to capitalize on these advantages during the industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Quite how far the Dutch economy should be regarded as the first 'modern economy' or as the initiator of capitalism remains unclear, but its history continues to serve as a powerful frame of reference in academic literature.¹²

This is also true for the global ambitions of the Dutch Republic, which enabled the Netherlands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to maintain a vast overseas empire, stretching from Suriname and the Caribbean to Indonesia. Throughout the world, numerous visual remnants of the Dutch Golden Age can be found, from gabled town houses and military forts to street plans and canals. Architectural heritage is even recreated in Dutch-inspired theme parks in the United States, Japan, and China. Their cheerful, celebratory character stands in stark contrast to the grim heritage of Fort Elmina at Ghana, a large Dutch slave-trading complex that reminds visitors of the humanitarian costs that came with Dutch capitalism. The long-term effects of the Dutch presence in Asia, Africa, and the Americas have thus been both profound and mixed. The Dutch engagement with the Atlantic slave trade and plantation economies contributed to the demographic and ecological transformation of these areas. In Asia, a long history of human exploitation and military repression continues to affect societies

in Indonesia and elsewhere. Whereas the heritage and history of the Dutch East and West India Companies have long received a critical approach in these countries, in the Netherlands itself the colonial legacy long remained a blind spot. Post-colonial criticism has been slow to take hold in Dutch academic scholarship. Only in 2015 did the Rijksmuseum decide to review and adapt the titles and descriptions of artworks to accommodate current (post-)colonial sensitivities. Such initiatives coincided with public discussions about the inclusivity and diversity of the Golden Age past and its darker sides. If the Dutch Republic bred a culture of tolerance, it was as much the historical incubator of South Africa's apartheid regime. While compromise and accommodation may have been enduring political legacies of the United Provinces, the Dutch presence overseas also left a heritage of repression and violence. Baruch de Spinoza, Jan van Riebeeck, and Jan Pieterszoon Coen were part of the same society.

The impact of the Dutch Golden Age, then, is never fixed or clear-cut, depending as it does on the historical perspective of the interpreter. What many assessments over the ages tend to have in common is a narrative of exceptionalism. Since the Dutch case did not seem to fit into the larger European pattern, scholars have been keen to privilege its economic, social, and political developments as unique and distinctly Dutch. Claims about their lasting impact have rested on similar assumptions. For this reason, the very attempt to identify long-term continuities has also found its critics. There may be striking parallels between the Golden Age and the modern Netherlands, they argue, but what exactly do they reveal or explain? Contrasting examples are equally numerous, and several historians have pointed to the misleading nationalist focus of claims about pre-modern continuities. Whatever perspective one takes, it is undeniable that the inhabitants of the Dutch Republic had no clue as to where their society was heading. Indeed, there is little evidence that they regarded themselves as innovators of free-market economics or toleration, let alone 'modernity'.¹³ As this book has sought to emphasize, the Dutch Golden Age may have fostered economic innovation and scientific experiment, but it also prided itself on its resistance to political 'novelties' and protection of social hierarchies and tradition. Above all, its history was not as golden as later generations want us to believe.

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9. Stott, *Holland Mania*.
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Glossary

Binnenhof Complex of government buildings in The Hague: seat of the States of Holland and the federal institutions of the United Provinces (States General, Raad van State). The southern parts were normally occupied by the stadholder of Holland (stadholder's quarters).

Burgher Citizen of a town or city.

Burgomaster Mayor: highest magistrate in a town, normally elected from the local *vroedschap*.

Delegated States Standing committee of the States of a particular province.

Guild Association of artisans or merchants who control the practice of their craft in a particular town.

Heeren XVII Board of Directors of the VOC.

Heeren XIX Board of Directors of the WIC.

kermissen Annual fairs held throughout the Dutch Republic, frequently depicted in genre paintings.

polder Drained land.

Raad van State Council of State: advisory body of the Generality, particularly in financial and military affairs.

rederijkers Members of civic confraternities (Chambers of Rhetoric) who engage in amateur drama and lyrics.

regent Common description for anyone who held a political office on local, provincial or national level.

Rhetoricians See *rederijkers*.

schutterij City guard or civic militia, consisted of urban male citizens. Members were called *schutters*. Regularly depicted on large group portraits, such as Rembrandt's *Night Watch*.

Stadholder The highest office holder in one or more of the seven provinces that constituted the Dutch Republic. Usually a member of the house of Orange-Nassau or Nassau-Dietz.

States The highest authority in a province, generally made up of representatives from the local nobility and the towns.

States General Federal body, consisting of representatives from the seven provincial States of the Dutch Republic. Dealt with limited number of issues, including defence, foreign affairs, and conflicts between provinces.

trekvaart Dedicated canals, connecting towns and villages. Used for towed passenger barges.

Union of Utrecht Act of defence, agreed between the rebellious provinces in 1579. Later served as constitution of the Dutch Republic.

vroedschap Town council. Varied in size but usually consisted of about forty members.

VOC Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Dutch East India Company, established in 1602.

waterschappen Network of regional boards with responsibility for maintaining dykes and sluices.

WIC Geoctroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie: Dutch West India Company, established in 1621.

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Index

- Acquet, Hendrik d' (1632–1706), physician, 360
- Act of Abjuration (1581), 7, 109, 394
- Adams, John (17th c.), parliamentary agent, 394
- Admiralty Boards, 72, 76
Amsterdam, 77
Rotterdam, 78
- Aerssen van Sommelsdijck, Cornelis van (1637–1688), governor of Suriname, 83
- Aitzema, Lieuwe van (1600–1669), historian, 79
- Alba, Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, Duke of (1507–1582), governor-general of the Netherlands (1576–1573), 70, 91, 92, 94, 127, 130
- alba amicorum*, 290
- Albert VII, Archduke, of Austria (1559–1621), 91
- alchemy, 232, 356
- Alkmaar, 20, 22, 23, 42, 95, 354, 356, 357
- Allard, Carel (1648–), artist, 115
Nieuwe Hollandsche Scheepsbouw (1695), 115
- Ambon (East Indies), 103, 166, 204, 205
Ambon War (1651–1655), 166
Amboyna Massacre, 103, 172
- Amsterdam, *passim*
Admiralty Board. *See* Admiralty Boards,
Amsterdam
Bank, 160
Binnengasthuis, 363
book market, 132–133
canals, 1, 23, 77
Dam Square, 23, 134, 230
expansion of, 22–23
Holy Way (Heilige Weg), 238
Jewish community, 211–212, 227–230
Stock Exchange, 160, 257
Theatre, 136, 234, 301, 303, 304, 306, 323, 325
Town Hall, 5, 21, 24, 25, 57, 256, 314, 320–321
- Anabaptism, Anabaptists, 57, 225, 231, 373.
See also Mennonites; Protestantism
- anatomical theatre, 334, 363, 364. *See also* surgery
- Anglo-Dutch Wars, 103
First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654), 72, 83, 93
Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667), 176
Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–1674), 178
- Anthonisz van Alkmaar, Adriaan (1541–1620), mathematician and cartographer, 354
- Antwerp, 7, 16, 27, 51, 55, 59, 73, 91, 127, 129, 159, 167, 237, 252, 255, 261, 290, 291, 292, 295, 319, 338
Fall of (1585), 27, 159, 251, 291
immigration from, 51, 53, 96, 129, 291, 338
- architecture, 4, 11, 24, 54, 182, 229, 240, 289, 308, 311, 312, 313, 314, 321, 394
classicist, 316–321
- aristocracy, 4, 87, 113, 118, 130, 131, 140, 167, 258, 272, 335
- Aristotelianism, 142, 294, 298, 303, 306, 312, 315, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 344, 352
- Arminianism, Arminians. *See* Remonstrantism
- Arminius, Jacobus (1560–1609), theologian, 126, 143, 198, 199. *See also* Remonstrantism
- Army, of the Dutch Republic. *See* States Army
- art market, 25, 250–255, 257, 258, 259, 261, 263, 272, 276

- Asselijn, Thomas (1620–1701), poet and playwright, 257, 306, 321, 325
Rise and Fall of Masaniello (Op- en ondergang van Mas Anjello, 1668), 306
 astronomy, 341, 354, 355, 366
 atheism, atheists, 201, 202, 232, 346, 386
 Aubignac, François Hedelin d' (1604–1676), author and cleric, 312
 auctions, 183, 250, 260
- Balen, Petrus van (1643–1690), preacher, 376, 385
 Baltic, trade, 33, 39, 40, 42, 151, 159, 321
 Banda Islands, 81, 81, 103, 173, 204, 205
 Bank of England (1694), 394
 Banning Cocq, Frans (1605–1655), Amsterdam burgomaster, 22
 Banten (Java), 28, 29
 Bartjens, Willem (1569–1638), mathematician, 338
 Batavia (Jakarta), 28, 29, 62, 64, 116, 167, 169, 170, 174, 176, 179, 180, 181, 182, 204, 205, 206, 361, 366
 Batavian myth, 3, 4, 5, 26, 57, 64, 121, 299
 Baudius, Dominicus (1561–1613), poet, scholar and historian, 343
 Bayle, Pierre (1647–1706), philosopher, 58, 346, 374, 376, 382, 387, 388
 Beeckman, Isaac (1588–1637), scientist, 358, 361
 Beemster polder, 3, 5, 6, 36
 Beggars (Gueux), 102, 189, 190
Beggars' Song Book (Geuzenliedboek), 95
 Bekker, Balthasar (1634–98), theologian, 126, 203, 378, 379, 380, 381, 383, 384
De betoverde Weereldt (The World Bewitched) (1691–1693), 378
 Berckheyde, Gerrit (1638–1698), artist, 25, 230
 Bergh, Johannes van den (fl. 1660–1670), Amsterdam bookseller, 258
 Beverland, Adriaan van (1650–1716), writer, 59, 384, 385, 386
 Bible, 25, 141, 203, 206, 235, 242, 263, 333, 335, 336, 337, 342, 347, 374, 378, 379, 384
 and education, 336–338
 criticism, 379, 384
 Dutch translation of, 26, 27
 Bicker, Wendela (1635–1668), 113
 Bijns, Anna (1493–1575), writer and schoolteacher, 127
 Bils, Louis de (1624–1671), anatomist, 364
 Blaeu, Joan Willemsz (1596–1673), cartographer and publisher, 181, 183, 265
 Blaeu, Willem Jansz (1571–1638), cartographer and publisher, 302
 Boë Sylvius, François de le (1614–72), professor of medicine, 358, 365
 Boerhaave, Herman (1668–1738), professor of medicine, 367
 Boileau, Nicolas (1636–1711), poet and critic, 313
 Bol, Ferdinand (1616–1680), artist, 257
 Bontekoe, Willem Ysbrandtszoon (1587–1657), Dutch East India Company skipper, 304, 385, 386
Journal (1646), 304
 Bontius, Jacob (1592–1631), physician, 183, 361
 Bontius, Reynier (1576–1623), physician, 93
 book market, 132, 135, 146, 250–255, 259, 263
 banned books, 135, 376
 bookshops, 27, 132, 134
 Bor, Pieter (1559–1635), historian, 102, 121
 Borch, Gerard ter (1617–1681), artist, 276, 279
 Both, Pieter, first governor-general of Dutch East Indies (1609–1614), 203
 Bouman, Elias (1635–1686), architect, 228, 229
 Boursse, Esaiiah (1631–1672), artist, 149
 Bouwmeester, Johannes (1634–1680), physician and philosopher, 373, 377, 386
 Brabant, 7, 16, 38, 46, 51, 54, 56, 91, 153, 167, 211
 Bracciolini, Poggio (1380–1459), humanist, 142
 Brandenburg, 321
 Bray, Salomon de (1597–1664), artist, 309
 Brazil, 18, 60, 61, 75, 83, 100, 117, 166, 171–183, 190, 203, 204, 205, 228, 361
 Breda, 128, 358
 Bredero, Gerhard Adriaensz (1585–1618), poet and playwright, 56, 289, 295, 296, 299, 341
The Spanish Brabanter (Spaanschen Brabander, 1617), 295–296
 Breeckvelt, Willem (fl. 1650–1654), The Hague printer, 140
 Brés, Guy de (1522–1567), theologian, 193
 Britain. *See* England
 Broecke, Berent ten (Bernardus Paludanus) (1550–1633), physician, 359
 Brouwer, Hendrick (1581–1643), governor-general of Dutch East Indies (1632–1636), 180, 182
 Bruegel the Elder, Pieter (c. 1525/30–1569), artist, 275
 Bruges, 16, 34, 261
 Brussels, 16, 51, 59, 128, 131, 291, 353

- Buchelius, Arnoldus (Buchel, Aernout van) (1565–1641), antiquarian, 196, 221
- Buddhism, Buddhists, 174, 204
- Burgundy, House of, 109
- Calvin, John (1509–1564), theologian, 219
- Calvinism, Calvinists, 7, 11, 50, 54, 57, 89, 90, 91, 125, 127, 141, 143, 174, 175, 189–206, 209, 210, 215, 217, 218, 221, 226, 231, 233, 234, 235, 237, 239–244, 256, 292, 293, 300, 301, 302, 305, 336, 344, 345, 346, 347, 351, 352, 353, 373, 374, 380. *See also* Counter-Remonstrantism; Protestantism; Remonstrantism
- doctrine, 143, 174, 226
- orthodoxy, 92, 141, 174, 213, 228, 234, 372
- Reformed Church, 8, 27, 54, 92, 141, 174, 210, 211, 212–213, 214, 215, 216, 218, 219, 220, 223, 226, 232, 233, 234, 238, 333, 337, 341, 342, 372, 375, 378, 379
- camera obscura, 357
- Campen, Jacob van (1595–1657), architect and artist, 24, 312, 314, 318, 320
- Camphuysen, Dirck Raphaelsz (1586–1627), minister, 264
- canals, 23, 32, 33, 34, 38, 42, 176, 397. *See also* Amsterdam, canals; drainage of land
- Candidius, Georgius (1597–1647), theologian, 62, 63, 64
- Cape Colony, 60, 62, 75, 167, 168, 169, 170, 179, 180, 181, 204
- Cape of Good Hope. *See* Cape Colony
- Capelle, Jan van de (c. 1626–1679), artist, 37
- Caravaggio (1571–1609), artist, 269, 326. *See also* Utrecht, Caravaggisti
- Cartesianism, 198, 201, 202, 203, 346, 352, 353, 358, 370, 373, 375, 377, 378, 385, 387
- Casteleyn, Abraham (1628–1681), Haarlem printer, 114, 137
- Casteleyn, Pieter (1618–1676), Haarlem printer and artist, 114
- catechism, 92, 175, 226, 232, 335, 337, 342
- Heidelberg Catechism, 193, 337
- Catholicism, Catholics, 7, 50, 51, 56, 57, 58, 59, 90, 91, 92, 101, 102, 127, 132, 140, 141, 174, 182, 189, 190, 192, 193, 195, 199, 204, 205, 206, 208–223, 225, 226–239, 240, 241, 256, 264, 292, 293, 301, 302, 336, 340, 341, 342, 343, 347, 347, 373, 393
- Cats, Jacob (1577–1660), poet and grand pensionary of Holland (1629–1631 and 1636–1652), 4, 197, 241, 242, 289, 300, 301, 305, 348
- censorship, 55, 125, 134–137, 138, 183, 302
- self-censorship, 137
- Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 167, 169, 172, 180, 190, 203, 204, 205
- Chambers of Rhetoric, 125, 126–127, 142, 233, 234, 235, 240, 290, 291, 292, 301, 314, 353
- Charles I (1600–1649), King of England, Scotland and Ireland (1625–1649), 393
- Charles II (1630–1685), King of Scotland (1649–1685), King of England and Ireland (1660–1685), 15, 55
- Charles V (1500–1558), ruler of the Netherlands (1506–1555), King of Spain (1516–1556), 109, 209
- Cicero, Ciceronian, 142, 315, 316
- civic militias (*schutterij*), 21, 71, 101, 191, 217, 256
- Claesz, Adriaen, vice-admiral, 83
- Claesz, Cornelis (1546–1609), Amsterdam publisher and bookseller, 252
- classicism, 308–328
- architecture, 24, 312, 316–321
- art, 312
- theatre, 303, 304, 306, 312, 313, 314, 321–325
- Clusius, Carolus (1526–1609), botanist, 359, 362
- Cluyt, Dirk Outgers (16th c.), Delft pharmacist, 363
- Cocceianism, Cocceians, 201–203, 380. *See also* Voetianism
- Cocceius, Johannes (1603–1669), theologian, 198, 200, 201, 202. *See also* Cocceianism
- Coecke van Aelst, Pieter (1502–1550), artist, 318
- Coen, Jan Pietersz (1587–1629), governor-general of Dutch East Indies (1619–1623 and 1627–1629), 28, 81, 81, 169, 173, 204, 302, 398
- Coenen, Adriaen (1514–1587), Scheveningen fish merchant, 359
- coffee, 134, 162, 254
- coffee houses, 134
- Colijns, David (1582–1665), artist, 259
- confessionalism, 192–194, 202, 333, 336, 342
- Coolhaes, Caspar (1536–1615), preacher, 196
- Coornhert, Dirk Volkertsz (1522–1590), writer, 196, 292, 293, 296, 297
- Ethics, or the Art of Living Well* (*Zedekunst, dat is wellevenskunste*, 1586), 293
- Copernicanism, 352
- Corneille, Pierre (1606–1684), French playwright, 306, 312, 322
- Coromandel Coast, 169, 204
- corruption, 78–79, 119–120, 180
- Coster, Samuel (1579–1665), physician and playwright, 296, 299, 300, 302, 341, 342

- Council of State (Raad van State), 69, 72, 109
 Counter-Reformation, 292, 347
 Counter-Remonstrantism, Counter-Remonstrants, 92, 143, 198–200, 214, 299, 300, 302. *See also* Remonstrantism
 Court, Johan de la (1622–1660), political writer, 373, 374, 386
 Court, Pieter de la (1618–1685), political writer, 373, 374, 386
 Court culture, 55, 181
 Cuffeler, Abraham Johannes (c. 1637–), jurist and philosopher, 376, 380
 Curaçao (Antilles), 117, 167, 174, 204
 curiosities, cabinets of, 229, 241, 242
- Datheen, Petrus (1531–1588), theologian, 128
 Delft, 18, 22, 25, 56, 80, 95, 154, 169, 191, 219, 221, 254, 258, 262, 283, 286, 356, 360, 363, 390
 Delftware, 1, 18, 254, 258
 demonology, 381, 382
 Den Bosch. *See* 's-Hertogenbosch
 Den Briel, 70
 Denmark, Danes, 39, 42, 153, 157. *See also* Scandinavia; Baltic, trade
 Descartes, René (1596–1650), philosopher, 55, 200, 201, 202, 306, 315, 344, 346, 347, 352, 357, 358, 361, 365, 367, 372, 383, 387. *See also* Cartesianism
 Deventer, 27, 38, 58, 216, 251, 376, 377
 Dijkgrafen, 43
 Disaster, Year of (1672), 79, 119, 125, 136
 discussion culture, 43, 88, 91, 93, 99, 113, 114, 119, 124–146, 234, 295, 301, 333
 Does, Pieter van der (1562–1599), admiral, 73
 domesticity, in painting, 149, 281–286
 Donck, Adriaen van der (1618–1655), lawyer and land-owner in New Netherland, 60
 Dordrecht, 21, 23, 77, 113, 170, 194, 200, 216, 300, 358, 379
 Dou, Gerrit (1613–1675), artist, 268, 276, 279
 Douai, 59
 drainage of land, 3, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41–44, 151
 Drebbel, Cornelis (c. 1572–1633), inventor, 356
 Drenthe, 38, 40, 153, 210
 Duifhuis, Hubert (1531–1581), preacher, 196
 Dunkirk, 73
 Dutch Academy (Nederduytsche Academie, 1617), 232, 234, 296, 299, 341
 Dutch East India Company (VOC), 1, 18, 28, 29, 53, 60, 61, 62, 63, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 99, 103, 104, 116, 154, 155, 156, 161, 162, 171–183, 189, 190, 203, 204, 256, 302, 304, 353, 360, 361, 366, 398
 Heeren XVII, 116
 military, 81, 81, 83, 83, 84
 Dutch West India Company (WIC), 18, 60, 61, 73, 74, 76, 83, 83, 84, 92, 99, 100, 103, 104, 116, 117, 154, 155, 171–183, 189, 190, 203, 204, 256, 360, 361, 398
 Duym, Jacob (1547–c. 1624), poet and historian, 295
The Murderous Crime of Balthasar Gerards (Het moordadich stuck van Balthasar Gerards, 1606), 295
 dykes, 32, 35, 37, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47
- East India Company (VOC). *See* Dutch East India Company (VOC)
 education, 27, 59, 203, 204, 206, 333–348, 352, 368
 French Schools, 338–340
 Illustrious Schools, 234, 334, 344, 345, 346, 352
 Latin Schools, 334, 339, 340, 342, 346, 352, 358
 multi-confessional education, 341–343
 parish schools, 336
 private schools, 337–338
 universities, 19, 24, 55, 59, 63, 125, 132, 142, 189, 198, 199, 202, 231, 232, 234, 262, 292, 294, 296, 334, 336, 340, 343–348, 352, 354, 356, 357, 358, 359, 362, 363, 365, 368, 376. *See also* Leiden, university; Utrecht, university
 Eglantine, the, 296, 298, 299. *See also* Chambers of Rhetoric
 Eindhoven, 80
 Elizabeth Stuart (1596–1662), Electress Palatine and Queen of Bohemia, 55
 Elmina (Ghana), 61, 171, 204, 397
 emblem literature, 237, 241, 242, 301, 347, 348
 Emden, 129, 191, 194
 Ende, Caspar van den (1614), Rotterdam French schoolmaster, 339, 342
 Enden, Franciscus van den (1602–1674), schoolmaster and political writer, 203, 373, 374, 383, 385, 386
 England, English, 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 15, 16, 18, 24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 49, 51, 52, 55, 61, 79, 89, 90, 99, 100, 103, 104, 107, 112, 114, 115, 117, 119, 124, 125, 130, 131, 137, 155, 162, 171, 172, 175, 176, 182, 197, 219, 221, 231, 235, 249, 264, 300, 308, 321, 339, 345, 351, 371, 373, 378, 379, 387, 393, 394. *See also* Anglo-Dutch Wars
 English East India Company, 172, 178
 Enkhuizen, 42, 54, 131, 168, 169, 170, 202
 Enlightenment, 222, 327, 381, 382, 386, 396
 epigrams, 290, 297

- Episcopus, Simon (1583–1643), theologian, 199
- Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1466–1536), humanist, 314, 315, 316
- esotericism, 232
- Evelyn, John (1620–1706), writer, 249
- factorijen*, 61, 116, 169, 170
- Fagel, Gaspar (1634–1688), Grand Pensionary of Holland (1672–1688), 112
- Farms, Farmers. *See* peasants, peasant population
- Farnese, Alexander (1545–1592), Duke of Parma, Piacenza and Castro (1586–1592), governor of Spanish Netherlands (1578–1592), 45, 291
- Felltham, Owen (1602–1668), English writer, 208
- Ferdinand III (1608–1657), Holy Roman Emperor (1637–1657), 303
- fisheries, 33, 35, 154, 155
- Flanders, Flemish, 7, 16, 34, 51, 53, 54, 56, 73, 91, 98, 104, 211, 249, 274, 275, 294, 373
- Flinck, Govert (1615–1660), artist, 257
- Flud van Giffen, David (1653–1701), theologian, 202
- Focquenbroch, Willem Godschalck van (1640–1670), poet and playwright, 305
- foreign policy, 74, 104, 109, 110, 115, 119, 139
- Formosa (Taiwan), 64, 116, 117, 169, 174, 175, 176, 178, 190, 204, 205
- France, French, 1, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 29, 30, 44, 45, 51, 52, 55, 60, 61, 79, 85, 94, 97, 100, 104, 108, 114, 115, 128, 130, 131, 140, 145, 156, 159, 173, 175, 191, 258, 290, 292, 312, 313, 339, 343, 347, 352, 377, 378, 386, 393, 397
- French classicism, theatre, 312, 322–323, 326
- French Huguenots, 27, 54, 60, 61, 90, 128, 176, 263, 376–378
- French Revolution, 208, 327
- French Schools. *See* Education, French Schools
- language, 27, 337, 345, 352
- neo-classicism, 289–307
- Francius, Petrus (Pieter de Frans) (1645–1704), philologist and professor, 348
- Franeker, 189, 354, 357
- Frederick Henry (1584–1647), Prince of Orange, Stadholder of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Overijssel and Gelderland (1625–1647) and Groningen and Drenthe (1640–1647), 55, 79, 97, 98, 103, 112, 256, 308, 309, 311, 356
- Frederick V (1596–1632), Elector Palatine (1610–1632), King of Bohemia (1619–1620), 55
- Friesland, 20, 35, 43, 50, 52, 72, 110, 111, 134, 152, 162, 189, 191, 210, 376
- Further Reformation, 194, 197–198, 200, 202
- Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), scholar and philosopher, 356, 357, 386, 387
- Siderius Nuncius* (1610), 356
- Gelderland, 38, 40, 52, 211
- Germany, Germans, 16, 52, 53, 54, 55, 62, 79, 80, 126, 128, 151, 156, 159, 174, 176, 180, 300, 339, 345, 347
- German Reformation, 193
- Geuzenliedboek* (*Beggars' Song Book*). *See* Beggars, *Beggars' Song Book*
- Ghent, 16, 51, 291, 294
- Pacification of (1576), 102
- Gheyn, Jacob (Jacques) de (1565–1629), artist, 356
- Gibraltar, Battle of (1607), 100
- glass manufacture, 263, 355. *See also* lenses; microscopes; optics; telescopes
- Glauber, Johann Rudolf (1604–1670), pharmacist, alchemist and chemist, 365
- Glazemaker, Jan Hendricksz (c. 1619–1682), translator, 373
- Glorious Revolution (1689), 8, 99, 112, 373, 379, 393
- Goeree, Willem (1635–1711), art theorist and bookseller, 379, 380–382, 383, 386
- Church and Worldly History*, (*Kerkelijke en wereldlijke historie*, 1705), 383
- Mosaïsche Oudheden* (1700), 383
- Golius, Jacobus (1596–1667), Arabist, 354
- Goltzius, Hendrik (1558–1617), artist, 312, 326, 327
- Gomarism, Gomarists. *See* Counter-Remonstrantism
- Gomarus, Franciscus (1563–1641), theologian, 143, 198, 199. *See also* Counter-Remonstrantism
- Gorée, 75
- Gouda, 24, 154, 196, 216, 220
- clay pipe industry, 154
- Sint Jan Church, 95
- Goyen, Jan van (1596–1656), artist, 253, 258
- Graaf, Renier de (1641–1673), physician and anatomist, 364, 365
- Graeff, Cornelis de (1599–1664), Amsterdam regent, 257
- grand pensionary, 110, 112, 113, 300, 354
- grand tour, 293, 298

- Great Assembly (1651), 217
- Grebber, Pieter de (1600–1652/1653), artist, 309
- Groenewegen, Henricus (1640–1692), theologian, 202
- Groningen, 22, 24, 35, 46, 110, 111, 134, 153, 170, 189, 191, 210, 343
- Grotius, Hugo (1583–1645), jurist and writer, 1, 2, 59, 121, 190, 199, 200, 299, 302, 315
On the Antiquity of the Batavian Republic (1610), 299
- Gueudeville, Nicolas (1652–1721), writer, 377, 382, 383
- Guicciardini, Lodovico (1521–1589), writer and merchant, 51
- guilds, 20, 21, 131, 157, 158, 221, 228, 262, 263, 334, 335, 352, 362, 363, 364, 368
 St Luke, 258, 262, 263, 335
- gunpowder, 315
- Gustav II Adolfus of Sweden (1594–1632), King of Sweden (1611–1632), 98
- Haarlem, Cornelis Cornelisz van (1562–1638), artist, 314, 326
- Haarlem, 7, 16, 22, 24, 25, 42, 45, 49, 51, 54, 57, 96, 154, 192, 196, 211, 232, 251, 262, 294, 316, 339, 341, 362, 390
- Mannerism, 326
- Habsburg Netherlands, 91, 209, 291, 292
- Hague, The, 15, 23, 55, 98, 110, 125, 131, 134, 139, 179, 194, 262, 300, 304, 318, 343, 346, 356, 362, 367, 370, 376, 377, 385
- Binnenhof, 97, 110, 134
- Hals, Dirck (1591–1656), artist
Garden Party (Buitenpartij), 1627), 4, 5
- Hals, Frans (1581/5–1666), artist, 1, 55, 309, 390
- Hebrew, 231, 232, 264, 341, 342
- Heemraden, 43, 110
- Heemskerck, Jacob van (1567–1607), admiral, 100
- Heemskerck, Johan van (1597–1656), poet, 3, 5
- Heeren XIX (WIC). *See* Dutch West India Company (WIC)
- Heeren XVII (VOC). *See* Dutch East India Company (VOC), Heeren XVII
- Heerhugowaard, 42
- Heidanus, Abraham (1597–1678), theologian, 202
- Hein, Piet Pietersz (1577–1629), admiral, 99, 171
- Heinsius, Daniel (1580–1655), classicist, 293, 294, 295, 298, 322, 343, 347
Cupid's Craft (Het ambacht van Cupido), 1613), 294
- William of Orange, or Wounded Liberty (Auriacus, sive libertas saucia)*, 1602), 295, 298
- Helmichius, Werner (1550–1608), preacher, 190
- Herbertszoon, Herman (–1607), preacher, 196
- herring fishery, 33, 35, 77, 155. *See also* fisheries
- 's-Hertogenbosch, 58, 79, 80, 98
- Heuraet, Hendrik van (1633–1660), mathematician, 354
- Heyden, Jan van der (1637–1712), inventor and artist, 25, 242, 243
Room Corner with Curiosities (1712), 242–244
- Heylyn, Peter (1599–1662), English ecclesiastic and writer, 49
- Heyns, Pierre (1537–1598), schoolmaster and writer, 338, 339
- Hiltten, Caspar van, courrantier and publisher, 133, 137
- Hinduism, Hindus, 174, 204
- Hobbema, Meindert (1638–1709), artist, 4, 36, 390
- Hobbes, Thomas (1588–1679), English philosopher, 346, 372, 376, 379, 384, 385, 387, 388
- Hogenberg, Frans (1535–1590), printer and cartographer, 96
- Holland, passim
 'Garden Holland', 121
- Holland Mission, 217, 218, 236
 States of, 17, 20, 41, 42, 43, 93, 140, 198, 199, 217, 238, 371, 375
- Holy Roman Empire, 6, 38, 51, 55, 59, 90, 128, 193, 217
- Honthorst, Gerard van (1590–1656), artist, 309
- Hooch, Pieter de (1629–1683), artist, 149, 283–284
A Mother with Her Children and a Servant (c. 1675), 283
- Hooft, Pieter Cornelisz (1581–1647), poet, playwright and historian, 121, 127, 142, 289, 296, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 341
- Baeto* (1616), 299
- Gerard van Velsen* (1613), 298–299, 302
- Hooghe, Romeyn de (c. 1645–1708), artist and propagandist, 99, 132, 229, 379, 380
Spiegel van staat (1706), 380
- Hoogstraten, Samuel van (1627–1678), artist and art theorist, 326, 335
Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst (1678), 335

- Hoorn, 28, 42, 54, 96, 127, 169, 170
 Hoornbeeck, Johannes (1617–1666), theologian, 197, 202
 Horace, Horacian, 312, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327
 Hortus, 359, 362, 363
 hospitals, municipal, 29, 363. *See also* Amsterdam, Binnengasthuis
 Houbraken, Arnold (1660–1719), artist and writer on art, 3, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383
The Great Theatre of Dutch Painters and Women Painters (Groote Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen, 1718–1721), 380
 house churches (*huiskerken*), 234, 235, 236, 237, 240, 241
 Hout, Jan van (1542–1609), Pensionary of Leiden, 292
 Houtman, Cornelis (1565–1599), explorer, 190
 Howell, James (1594–1666), Anglo-Welsh historian and writer, 208
 Hudde, Johannes (1628–1704), Amsterdam regent, 354, 356
 Hugo, Herman (1558–1629), preacher and writer
Pia Desideria (Pious Wishes, 1624), 237, 241, 242
 Huguenots, Huguenot refugees. *See* France, French Huguenots
 Huis ten Bosch, 308–312
 humanism, 142, 196, 294, 315, 316, 322, 334, 336, 343, 344, 345, 346, 348
 Huydecoper van Maarsseveen, Joan (1625–1704), Amsterdam regent, 136
 Huygens, Christiaan (1629–1695), scholar and inventor, 347, 354, 366, 367, 370
 Huygens, Constantijn (1596–1687), poet and secretary to Frederick Henry, 1, 4, 264, 301, 304–305, 318, 319, 320, 321
Cornflowers (Korenbloemen, 1658), 304
Desultory Moments (Momenta desultoria, 1644), 304
Holy Days (Heilighe dagen, 1645), 305
 house, 318–320
 iconoclasm, iconoclastic fury (1566), 59, 235, 240
 Illustrious School. *See* education, Illustrious Schools
 India, 29, 61, 62, 174, 180, 254, 366. *See also* Coromandel Coast; Malabar
 Indonesia, 28, 29, 61, 63, 168, 178, 397
 Inquisition, Spanish, 89, 90, 91, 135, 213, 232, 325
 Isabella de Austria, Archduchess (1566–1633), royal regent in Spanish Netherlands (1621–1633), 91
 Islam, 174, 204, 205, 226, 230, 232
 Israel, New, Second. *See* New Israel
 Italy, Italians, 16, 24, 25, 51, 151, 212, 294, 298, 309, 316, 317, 318, 323, 327, 352, 390
 Janssen, Sacharias (1585–1632), Middelburg spectacle-maker, 356
 Jansz, Broer (1579–1652), courantier and publisher, 133, 134, 137
 Java, 28, 62, 81, 169, 361
 Jelles, Jarig (1620–1683), Amsterdam merchant, 373
 Jerusalem, 197
 Jesuits, 90, 171, 203, 373
 John Maurice (1604–1679), Count of Nassau-Siegen, governor-general of Dutch Brazil (1637–1644), 171, 173, 181
 Jordaens, Jacob (1593–1678), artist, 311
 Judaism, Jews, 7, 16, 50, 52, 54, 57, 62, 157, 174, 193, 199, 205, 211, 212, 214, 220, 221, 225, 226–232, 233, 234, 237, 239, 241, 342, 380
 Ashkenazi (“High German”) Jews, 52, 211, 228
 in Amsterdam. *See* Amsterdam, Jewish community
 Sephardic (“Portuguese”) Jews, 52, 53, 54, 62, 193, 211, 214, 227, 228, 229, 342
 Junius, Franciscus (1545–1602), theologian and professor at Leiden, 127, 128, 129, 135, 199
 Junius, Robert (1606–1655), missionary in Formosa, 205
 Key, Lieven de (c. 1550–1627), architect, 87, 314, 316, 318
 Meat Hall (Vleeshal), 316
 Kieft, Willem (1597–1647), merchant and governor of New Netherland (1638–1647), 30
 Kieft’s War (1639–1645), 173
 Koelman, Jacobus (1632–1695), schismatic, 342
 Koerbagh, Adriaen (1632–1669), Spinozist writer, 126, 373, 375, 377, 381, 384, 385, 386
A Light Shining in Dark Places (1668), 375
 Koerbagh, Johannes (1634–1672), Spinozist writer, 373, 377

- Lairesse, Gerard de (1641–1711), artist, 55, 312
land reclamation. *See* drainage of land
landsknechten, 71
Latin (language), 180, 264, 294, 296, 297,
299, 300, 301, 304, 315, 336, 339, 341, 347,
348, 376, 377
Latin Schools. *See* education, Latin Schools
Leeghwater, Jan Adriaansz (1575–1650),
drainage expert, 3
Leenhof, Frederick van (1647–1715), preacher
and philosopher, 203, 376, 377, 378, 381,
383, 386
*Heaven on Earth (Den Hemel op Aarden), Or
a short and clear Account of the true and firm
happiness* (1703), 378
Leeuwarden, 20, 22
Leeuwenhoek, Anthonie van (1632–1723),
microscopist and microbiologist, 341,
347, 356, 370
Leicester, Robert Dudley, Earl of (1533–1588),
governor-general of United Provinces,
89
Leiden, 7, 16, 22, 23, 24, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55,
56, 59, 63, 80, 91, 93, 138, 149, 154, 156,
192, 196, 198, 200, 202, 214, 215, 220,
252, 260, 292, 294, 296, 345, 346, 355,
359, 370, 375, 383, 385
Siege of, 93, 95
university, 132, 142, 189, 198, 199, 231, 262,
334, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 352, 354,
356, 358, 359, 362, 363, 364, 365, 367
lenses, 315, 355, 356
Lery, Jean de (1536–1613), explorer, writer
and preacher, 203
Lescailje, Katharina (1649–1711), writer,
publisher and bookseller, 306
Levier, Charles (–1735), The Hague booksel-
ler, 377
libellous books. *See* pamphlets
libertinism, 59, 125, 196, 198, 225, 240, 342,
379, 380
liefhebbers ('sympathizers'), 192, 211, 240
linen industry. *See* textile industry
Linschoten, Jan Huygen van (1533–1611),
travel writer, 168, 359
Itinerario (1596), 168
Lipperhey, Hans (1570–1619), spectacle-
maker, 356
Lipsius, Justus (1547–1606), humanist scho-
lar, 138, 343
literacy, 25, 27, 264, 333, 335, 337, 338, 345,
348, 352, 355, 367, 372
Locke, John (1632–1704), English philoso-
pher and physician, 55, 346
London, 16, 17, 52, 129, 191, 194, 318, 346, 366,
368, 390
Looten, Karel (1575–), merchant, 3
Lope de Vega y Carpio, Félix (1562–1635),
Spanish poet and playwright, 321, 323
Lopez, Alphonso, Portuguese collector, art
dealer, jeweler and agent, 229
Louis, Count of Nassau (1538–1574), 90
Louis XIV, King of France (1643–1715), 1, 8, 9,
60, 85, 99, 140, 312, 367, 377, 378, 393
lower classes, 78, 131, 133, 140, 334
Lucas, Jean-Maximilien (c. 1646–1697), bio-
grapher of Spinoza, 376, 377
Lumey, Willem II van der Marck (1542–1578),
admiral, 102
Luther, Martin (1483–1547), theologian, 126.
See also Lutheranism
Lutheranism, Lutherans, 53, 54, 57, 90, 101,
127, 174, 190, 193, 210, 211, 214, 215, 217,
225, 233, 342, 345, 373. *See also*
Protestantism
Lutma the elder, Johannes (1584–1669), sil-
versmith, 256
Maastricht, 24, 58, 98, 345
Maes, Nicholas (1634–1693), artist, 149
Maets, Carel de (1640–1690), professor in
chemistry, 365
Makassar (Sulawesi), 81, 166, 171, 182, 205
Malabar (India), 170, 172, 204, 366
Mander, Karel van (1548–1606), artist and art
theorist, 293, 294, 295, 316, 318, 326, 335
The Book of Painters (Het Schilder-Boeck,
1604), 294, 316, 318, 335
Mannerism. *See* Haarlem Mannerism
Marcgraf, Georg (1610–1644), German nat-
uralist and astronomer, 183, 361
Marin, Pierre, French schoolmaster, 339
Marot, Daniël (1663–1752), artist and archi-
tect, 55
marriage, mixed marriage, interfaith mar-
riage, 220
Mataram (Java), 29, 81, 169
mathematics, 97, 338, 341, 350, 353, 354, 355,
357, 358, 367, 386, 387
Matthysz, Hans, Leiden publisher, 252
Maurice of Nassau (1567–1625), Prince of
Orange (1618), Stadholder of Holland
and Zeeland (1585), Utrecht and
Overijssel (1590), Gelderland (1591),
Groningen and Drenthe (1620), 55, 59,
71, 73, 80, 81, 92, 97, 104, 130, 143, 145,
200, 299, 302, 353, 354, 356, 361, 371
medicine, 296, 334, 340, 341, 344, 347, 350,
358, 359, 360, 361–363, 366, 367, 368,
373, 376, 385. *See also* pharmacies; phy-
sicians; surgery,
Collegium Medicum, 362, 363

- Mennonites, 90, 101, 190, 210, 211, 214, 215, 217, 218, 220, 221, 231, 232, 233, 234, 239, 301, 341, 342. *See also* Anabaptism
- mercenaries, 15, 70, 71, 76
- Merian, Maria Sibylla (1647–1717), artist, 361
- Metius, Adriaan Adriaansz (1571–1635), geometer and astronomer, 354
- Metius, Jacob (1571–1624/31), instrument-maker and spectacle-maker, 356
- Meuse (Maas), 11, 35, 38, 45, 47, 170
- Meyer, Lodewijk (1638–1681), physician, scholar and writer, 306, 373, 375, 380, 381, 386
De Jure Ecclesiasticorum (1665), 380
Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres (1666), 375
- microscopes, 355, 356, 357, 364, 367. *See also* Optics
- Middelburg, 24, 76, 83, 129, 160, 191, 194, 197, 263, 345, 357, 362
- migration, 49–64, 225, 226, 393
forced migration. *See* slavery
- Mijtens, Jan (1614–1670), artist, 62
- military, 69–85. *See also* civic militias; States Army
labour, 81–84
markets, 76–79
military revolution, 70–74
mutiny, 84
occupation, 79–81
- mills, 18, 35, 36, 167, 355. *See also* drainage of land; *polders*
- Modetus, Herman, Utrecht pastor, 199
- Moluccas (East Indies), 63, 166, 169, 204
- Momma from Middelburg, Wilhelmus (1642–1677), preacher, 380
- monarchy, monarchism, 6, 7, 8, 9, 88, 109, 111, 118, 125, 131, 172, 371, 372, 393, 395, 396. *See also* Orangism
anti-monarchism, 377, 378. *See also* republicanism
- monism, 374, 384
- Moors, 190, 203
- Morocco, Moroccan, 231, 233, 367
- multi-confessionalism, 209, 210, 212, 215, 218, 219, 221. *See also* education, multi-confessional education
- Münster, Peace of (1648), 44, 276, 281. *See also* Westphalia, Peace of
- Musch, Cornelis (c. 1592–1650), griffier (Chief Clerk) of the States General, 120
- Muyden Castle, 298
- Naarden, 94
- Nagasaki, 170, 181, 366
- Nantes, Edict of (1598)
Revocation (1685), 99, 339
- Nassau
counts of, 111, 128, 256
- Nassau-Odijk, Willem Adriaan van (c. 1632–1705), 120
- natural science, 344, 346, 347
- navy, 69–85, 89, 95, 100, 101, 111, 115, 140, 154, 155, 157, 172, 175, 304, 356
professionalization of, 72
- neo-Epicureanism, 377, 386
- New Amsterdam (New York), 29, 30, 60
- New Israel, 1, 57, 64, 90, 121, 197, 213
- New Netherland, 60, 75, 117, 171, 172, 176, 204
- news books, 114
Europische Mercurius, 114
Hollandsche Mercurius, 114
- news maps, 96–97
- newspapers, 27, 28, 60, 99, 114, 133, 134, 137
Opregte Haarlemsche Courant, 114
- Nieuwhof, Johan (1618–1672), traveller and travel writer, 180, 182
- Nieuwpoort, Battle of (1600), 73, 74, 104
- Nijmegen, 216, 341, 345
- Nil Volentibus Arduum, 306, 312, 322, 325
- Noot, Jan van der (1539–1595), poet, 292
- Nova Zembla (Novaya Zemlya), 168, 304
- novels, 304, 376
- Ochtervelt, Jacob (1634–1682), artist, 277, 278, 278
Musical Company in an Interior (c. 1670), 277, 278
- Oldenbarnevelt, Johan van (1547–1619), advocate of Holland (1586–1618), 8, 59, 92, 94, 120, 130, 138, 139, 143, 145, 199, 200, 302
- oligarchy. *See* regents
- optics, 350, 355, 356, 357, 367
- Orange Hall. *See* Huis ten Bosch
- Orange-Nassau
Court of, 111, 262
House of, 87, 92, 111, 118, 140, 256, 308, 311, 318, 371, 372, 378. *See also* Frederick Henry; Maurice of Nassau; William of Orange; William II; William III
- Orangism, Orangists, 93, 100, 118, 119, 120, 125, 131, 372, 378, 379, 380
- Oranjezaal. *See* Huis ten Bosch
- orphanages, 22, 352
- Ostade, Adriaen van (1610–1685), artist, 278, 280, 281, 282
Carousing Peasants (c. 1635), 278, 281
Interior of a Peasant Cottage (1668), 279

- Ostend (Flanders), Siege of (1601–1604), 134
 Oudewater, 93
 Overijssel, 19, 20, 38, 52, 58, 110, 153, 211
 Ovid, Ovidian, 2, 3, 11
- Paget, John (1574–1638), English clergyman and pastor, 231
- painting
 genre painting, 240, 242, 268–286, 308, 390, 395
 history painting, 242, 259, 264
 landscape, 4, 25, 36, 37, 55, 183, 229, 240, 253, 263, 264, 308, 390
 peasant scenes, 253, 275, 275, 278, 279, 333
 seascape, 37, 107, 240, 253, 308
 still life, 240, 242, 253, 308, 390
- Palladio, Andrea (1508–1580), Italian architect, 309, 318
- pamphlets, 34, 57, 80, 99, 114, 125, 126, 127, 128, 132, 133, 134, 136, 139, 141, 142, 145, 237, 292, 348, 355, 379. *See also* discussion culture; print
- pamphlet war, 92, 126, 130, 138, 139
- Paracelsianism, 365
- Paris, 16, 17, 52, 306, 346, 367, 368, 390
- Parma, Duke of. *See* Farnese, Alexander
- patricians. *See* regents
- patronage, 136, 142, 143, 145, 199, 214, 228, 229, 240, 241, 255–258, 264, 272, 276, 280, 283, 286
- Pattingalloang, chancellor of the kingdom of Gowa-Talloq, 166, 171, 182
- Pauw, Pieter (1564–1617), botanist and anatomist, 363
- peasants, peasant population, 34, 36, 39, 40, 43, 53, 151–153, 249. *See also* painting, peasant scenes
- Pels, Andries (1631–1681), playwright and founder of Nil Volentibus Arduum, 307, 326
Gebruik én misbruik des tooneels (1681), 325
- Pepys, Samuel (1633–1703), naval administrator and Chief Secretary to the Admiralty, 308, 312
- Perkins, William (1558–1602), English clergyman and theologian, 199
- Perrault, Charles (1628–1703), French writer, 312
- Peter the Great (1672–1725), tsar (1682–1721), 360, 364, 397
- petitions, 21, 114, 131, 228. *See also* discussion culture
- pharmacies, 360, 362. *See also* medicine
- Philip II (1527–1598), King of Spain, ruler of Habsburg Netherlands (1555–98), 7, 8, 70, 109, 127, 138, 168, 209, 210, 393, 394
- Philips of Marnix, Lord of Saint-Aldegonde (1540–1598), writer and statesman, 292
- philology, 343, 344, 345, 347, 347
- philosophy, 58, 59, 126, 198, 200, 201, 202, 203, 206, 223, 239, 296, 297, 306, 341, 343, 344, 346, 350, 357, 358, 359, 365, 368, 370–388. *See also* radical Enlightenment; rationalism; Spinozism
- physiology, 352, 358, 362, 365
- Piedmont Easter massacre (1656), 60
- pietism, 197, 342
- pilgrimages, 59, 231, 238
- Piso, Willem (1611–1678), physician, naturalist and botanist, 183, 361
Historia Naturalis Brasiliae (1648), 361
- placards, 114, 210, 213, 215, 216
- Plancius, Pieter (1552–1622), preacher and geographer, 190, 353
- Plantin, Christopher (c. 1520–1589), printer, 291
- Plempius, Vopiscus Fortunatus (1601–1671), anatomist, 358
- Plutarch, 297
- poetry, poets, 2, 4, 24, 88, 127, 128, 136, 142, 143, 144, 225, 233, 257, 258, 289–307, 321, 322, 326, 336, 344, 347, 348, 362
- Poland, Polish, 321, 345
- polders* (drained land), 3–5, 32–37, 41, 43, 46, 47, 96, 152. *See also* drainage of land
- Pomp, Dirck Gerritsz (1544–1608), sailor and explorer, 180, 182
- Porcellis, Jan (1584–1632), artist, 253
- Portugal, Portuguese, 7, 10, 16, 28, 52, 53, 61, 84, 91, 166, 167, 168, 169, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176, 180, 182, 183, 203, 211, 214, 227, 228, 229, 342, 353, 359
- Portuguese Jews. *See* Judaism, Sephardic ('Portuguese') Jews
- Portuguese Synagogue (Esnoga), 227, 228. *See also* Amsterdam, Jewish community; Judaism
- Post, Frans Jansz (1612–1680), artist, 183, 361
- Post, Pieter (1608–1669), architect, 24, 308
- Potter, Paulus (1624–1654), artist, 4
- Poussin, Nicolas (1594–1665), artist, 6
- poverty, 19, 22, 29, 33, 40, 78, 80, 126, 163, 191, 192, 206, 275, 281, 336, 363

- print, printing, 59, 96, 97, 99, 124, 125, 126, 128, 129, 132, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 218, 226, 231, 232, 237, 252, 258, 263, 264, 281, 291, 303, 304, 315, 318, 333, 348, 352, 373, 379, 380, 385. *See also* book market; newspapers; publishing industry
- news prints, 96, 97
- political print, 124, 125, 128, 129, 134, 136
- printing industry, 55, 59, 263, 355
- propaganda, 93, 97, 99, 127, 128, 129, 132, 133, 140, 173, 299, 377
- prostitution, 268, 274, 274, 278
- Protestantism, Protestants, 1, 6, 7, 17, 25, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 62, 89, 90, 95, 98, 99, 121, 126, 127, 128, 132, 135, 140, 141, 189–206, 208, 209, 210, 217, 225, 231, 233, 234, 236, 239, 240, 244, 256, 264, 291, 316, 333, 335, 336, 338, 340, 345, 347, 347, 348, 351, 367, 381, 393, 396. *See also* Anabaptism; Calvinism; Lutheranism
- martyrdom of. *See* Inquisition, Spanish
- Protestantism, Reformed. *See* Calvinism
- public church, 54, 95, 189, 190, 191–194, 199, 210, 211, 212–213, 214, 215, 222, 240, 343
- public debate, public opinion. *See* discussion culture
- publishing industry, 11, 25, 27, 55, 137, 240, 250, 253, 292, 335, 346, 376. *See also* Print
- Puritanism, Puritans, 52, 141, 172, 197, 202, 351. *See also* Further Reformation; pietism
- Questiers, Catharina (1631–1669), poet and playwright, 305
- Raad van State. *See* Council of State
- radical Enlightenment, 370, 373, 374, 386
- Raleigh, Sir Walter (1554–1618), English writer, scholar and explorer, 155
- rationalism, rationalist philosophy, 201–203, 351, 372, 375
- reading. *See* literacy
- Reael, Laurens Jacobsz (1536–1601), Amsterdam regent, 204
- Realism in art, 327, 392
- in poetry, 3, 305
- Rebellion, Dutch, 6, 83, 89, 129, 130, 191, 210, 264, 303, 393, 394. *See also* Beggars
- Recife (Pernambuco), 167, 176, 181, 204
- rederijkers, rederijkerskamers*. *See* Chambers of Rhetoric
- Reede tot Drakenstein, Hendrik Adriaan van (1636–1691), naturalist and colonial administrator, 366
- Reede van Amerongen, Godard Adriaan van (1621–1691), diplomat, 111
- Reformation. *See* Protestantism
- Reformed Church. *See* Calvinism, Reformed Church
- Reformed Protestantism. *See* Calvinism
- refugees, 17, 50, 51, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 63, 90, 91, 225. *See also* France, French Huguenots; migration
- regents, regent class, 19–20, 41, 42, 43, 74, 77, 97, 99, 112, 113, 114, 118, 130, 131, 132, 135, 145, 166, 191, 194, 196, 203, 208, 221, 256, 257, 272, 340, 352, 363, 371, 372, 378, 380
- Regius, Henricus (1598–1679), professor of medicine, 358
- Rembrandt (1606–1669), artist, 1, 22, 77, 101, 157, 221, 229, 256, 258, 259, 265, 268, 309, 314, 325, 326, 327, 363, 390
- Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp* (1632), 363
- The Night Watch* (1642), 22, 101, 256
- The Syndics* (1662), 221
- Remonstrantism, Remonstrants, 54, 59, 92, 101, 139, 143, 196, 198–200, 202, 211, 212, 214, 217, 221, 234, 299, 341, 342. *See also* Calvinism; Counter-Remonstrantism
- Arminian Controversy, 198–200, 212, 214
- Republicanism, Republicans, 7, 8, 55, 59, 118, 119, 120, 256, 350, 371, 372, 373, 377, 379, 386, 393, 396. *See also* monarchism; Orangism
- Reynst, Gerard (–1615), governor-general of Dutch East Indies (1614–1615), 203
- rhetoricians. *See* Chambers of Rhetoric
- Rhijne, Willem ten (1647–1700), physician and botanist, 366
- Rhine (Rijn), 11, 32, 35, 38, 40, 45, 47
- Riebeeck, Jan van (1619–1677), founder of Cape Colony, 181, 398
- Rieuwertsz, Jan (1617–1686), Amsterdam bookseller, 373
- Robbertsz le Canu, Robbert (1563–c. 1630), Amsterdam schoolmaster and writer, 338
- Rodenburgh, Theodore (1574–1644), diplomat, poet and playwright, 321
- Rotterdam, 24, 54, 78, 93, 160, 169, 170, 249, 263, 277, 334, 342, 346, 358, 364, 373, 376
- Rubens, Peter Paul (1577–1640), artist, 319, 320, 321
- Ruijven, Pieter Claesz van (1624–1674), art collector, 286

- Rumphius, Georg Eberhard (c. 1627–1702), botanist, 183, 360
 rural economy. *See* peasants, peasant population
 Ruysch, Frederick (1638–1731), anatomist, 364
 Ruysdael, Jacob van (1628/29–1682), artist, 4, 25, 36, 229, 390
 View of Haarlem (1650s), 25
 Ruysdael, Salomon van (1602–1670), artist, 253
- Sabbatarianism, 189, 198, 200, 202, 205
 Saint-Glain, Gabriel de (1620–1684), writer, 376, 377
 Salvador de Bahia (Brazil), 171
 Scaliger, Joseph (1540–1609), humanist scholar, 333, 334, 343, 348
 Scamozzi, Vincenzo (1548–1616), architect, 309, 318, 321
 L'idea delle architettura universale (1615), 318
 Scandinavia, Scandinavians, 52, 53, 54, 156, 157, 174, 176. *See also* Denmark; Sweden
 Scheldt, Schelde, 38, 129, 159
 schools. *See* education
 Schooten, Frans van (1615–1666), mathematician, 367
 Schouwburg. *See* Amsterdam, Theatre
 Schurman, Anna Maria van (1607–1678), artist, poet and scholar, 301, 340, 353
 Scientific Revolution, 344, 351
 Scriverius, Petrus (1580–1655), scholar, 294
 Sea Beggars, 70. *See also* Beggars
 Seba, Albertus (1665–1736), pharmacist and zoologist, 360
 Seneca, Senecan, 294, 302, 303, 321, 323, 325
 Sephardic Jews. *See* Judaism, Sephardic ('Portuguese') Jews
 Serlio, Sebastiano (1475–1554), architect, 318
 Sidney, Algernon (1623–1683), English republican and member of Long Parliament, 371, 388
 Sidney, Philip (1554–1586), diplomat, poet and soldier, 321
 silversmiths, goldsmiths, 157, 254
 Six van Chandelier, Jan (1620–1697), poet and merchant, 305, 362
 Sladus the Younger, Mattheus (early 17th century), teacher, scholar and writer, 342
 slavery, slave trade, 5, 28, 29, 50, 61–62, 63, 64, 81, 81, 103, 117, 167, 171, 172, 173, 175, 178, 179, 180, 181, 397
 Snel van Royen, Rudolph (Snellius) (1546–1613), mathematician and linguist, 354
 Snel van Royen, Willebrord (Snellius) (1580–1626), mathematician and astronomer, 354
 Socinianism, Socinians, 59, 211, 217, 225, 373
 Solms-Braunfels, Amalia van (1602–1675), 98, 256, 308
 songs, songbooks, 91, 92, 95, 142, 252, 292, 293, 298, 348
 sonnets, 292, 297, 298, 305. *See also* poetry
 Sorbière, Samuel (1615–1670), physician and philosopher, 345
 Spain, Spanish, 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 16, 34, 43, 44, 45, 46, 56, 57, 58, 61, 73, 84, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95, 96, 98, 99, 101, 103, 109, 115, 128, 130, 137, 138, 139, 140, 159, 166, 167, 170, 171, 172, 173, 175, 180, 182, 183, 189, 191, 197, 199, 200, 209, 214, 215, 231, 232, 276, 291, 292, 295, 296, 303, 305, 306, 321, 347, 356, 371. *See also* Inquisition, Spanish
 Armada, 73
 theatre, 321. *See also* Lope de Vega
 War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), 116, 130, 137
 Speelman, Cornelis (1628–1684), governor-general of Dutch East Indies (1681–1684), 81
 Spiegel, Hendrick Laurensz (1598–1667), Amsterdam poet, 233, 234, 244, 296, 297, 298, 380
 Dialogue on Dutch Grammar (*Twe-spraak vande Nederduitsche letterkunst*, 1584), 296
 Mirror of the Heart (*Hert-spiegel*, 1614), 297
 Numa, or Refusing Office (*Numa ofte amptsweygerinhe*), 297
 Spinola, Ambrogio (1569–1630), military commander, 356
 Spinoza, Baruch (Benedict) de (1632–1677), philosopher, 1, 10, 59, 126, 202, 306, 342, 347, 355, 370–388, 396, 398. *See also* Spinozism
 Spinozism, 126, 372, 377, 379, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387
 Spinozist circle (*cercle spinoziste*), 370, 372, 373, 374, 375, 380, 386
 Spranckhuijsen, Dionysius (–1650), preacher, 197
 Sri Lanka. *See* Ceylon (Sri Lanka)
 stadholder, 4, 6, 8, 20, 55, 59, 73, 77, 79, 88, 92, 94, 95, 97, 99, 100, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 118, 120, 140, 142, 200, 256, 257, 299, 308, 371. *See also* Frederick Henry; Maurice of Nassau; William of Orange; William II; William III

- stadholderless period (1650–1672), 118, 125, 131, 371, 372
- States Army, 2, 55, 69, 71, 72, 73, 75, 76, 77, 79, 81, 83, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 97, 101, 139, 140
- States Bible. *See* Bible, Dutch translation of
- States General, 7, 19, 72, 73, 80, 81, 84, 88, 89, 96, 97, 99, 100, 103, 104, 107, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 130, 169, 170, 172, 174, 178, 190, 192, 256, 262, 356
- Steen, Jan (1626–1679), artist, 309
- Stensen, Nicolas Steno (1638–1686), anatomist, geologist, 365
- Stevin, Simon (1548–1620), mathematician, and military engineer, 296, 353, 354
- Stock Exchange. *See* Amsterdam, Stock Exchange
- Stuyvesant, Peter (1611/12–1672), governor of New Netherland (1647–1664), 171, 174
- sugar, sugar industry, 18, 61, 73, 154, 167, 171, 172, 176, 254
- Sulawesi (Celebes), 81, 166
- surgery, 334, 350, 362, 363–364, 366
- Suriname, 60, 61, 83, 171, 173, 174, 175, 178, 204, 361, 397
- Swammerdam, Jan Jacobsz (1637–1680), scholar, 360, 364, 365
- Sweden, Swedish, 8, 98, 321. *See also* Scandinavia
- Swift, Jonathan (1667–1745), writer and theologian, 107
- synods, 192, 193, 194, 199, 204, 218, 375, 383
- Dordrecht (1578), 194
- Dordrecht (1618–1619), 26, 111, 192, 193, 194, 197, 198, 200, 204, 333, 336, 337, 341
- Middelburg (1581), 194
- South Holland (1706), 383
- The Hague (1586), 194, 343
- tableaux vivants*, 323
- Taiwan. *See* Formosa (Taiwan)
- Tasman, Abel (1603–1659), explorer, 178
- taxation, tax system, 8, 20, 22, 58, 70, 72, 78, 80, 88, 110, 130, 152
- tea, 162, 254
- Teellinck, Ewout (1573–1629), jurist, 197
- Teellinck, Willem (1579–1629), preacher, 197, 342
- telescopes, 355, 356, 357, 367. *See also* optics
- Temple, Sir William (1628–1699), diplomat, 2, 15, 16, 107, 124, 125, 160, 235, 396
- textile industry, 23, 25, 53, 149, 150, 154, 156, 180, 229, 252, 335
- theatre, 22, 56, 91, 92, 93, 139, 144, 225, 233, 234, 240, 244, 256, 262, 277, 289–307, 308, 312, 313, 314, 315, 321–325, 327, 334, 339, 341, 348, 372, 380
- pastoral theatre, 298
- tragedy, 294, 298, 299, 302, 322, 323
- Theophrastus Redivivus* (1659), 386
- Theunisz, Jan (1569–1638), printer and professor in Arabic, 231, 232, 234, 244
- Thirty Years War (1618–1648), 16, 80, 90, 197
- tolerance, religious tolerance, 11, 30, 59, 62, 126, 135, 141, 151, 173, 174, 176, 190, 208–223, 232, 240, 244, 371, 372, 374, 382, 386, 392, 393, 395, 396, 398
- Toleration Act (1689), 393
- Torrentius, Johannes (1589–1644), artist, 232
- town councils (*vroedschappen*), 19, 23, 24, 101, 213, 216, 220
- travel guides, 49, 238
- Trekvaarten, 34
- Trelcatius the Younger, Lucas (1542–1602), theologian and writer, 343
- Trip, Elias (c. 1570–1636), merchant, 77
- Trip, Hendrick (1607–1666), merchant, 77
- Trip, Jacob (1576–1661), merchant, 77
- Trip, Louis (1605–1684), merchant, 77
- Tromp, Maarten Harpertsz (1598–1653), admiral, 100
- True Freedom (1650–1672). *See* Stadholderless period (1650–1672)
- tulips, tulip mania, 18, 249, 359
- Tulp, Nicolaes (1593–1674), physician, and Amsterdam regent, 362, 363
- Twelve Years' Truce (1609–1621), 8, 34, 54, 87, 92, 115, 136, 138, 139, 143, 166, 170, 197, 200, 212, 214, 295, 299
- Twente, 58
- Tyssot de Patot, Simon (1655–1738), writer, 376, 377
- Udemans, Godefridus (1580–1649), preacher, 197
- Union of Utrecht (1579), 53, 72, 87, 109, 190, 209, 216
- universities. *See* education, universities
- urbanization, 4, 15–30, 51, 130, 249, 251, 256, 334, 348
- Ursinius, Zacharius (1534–1583), theologian, 193
- Utrecht, 9, 21, 24, 38, 96, 110, 111, 114, 189, 193, 196, 198, 199, 211, 212, 216, 221, 236, 251, 262, 269, 336, 340, 341, 343, 345, 346, 352, 358, 375, 379
- Caravaggisti, 269
- university, 198, 352
- Uytendogaert, Johannes (1557–1644), theologian, 130, 196, 199

- Uziel, Isaac ben Abraham (–1622), poet and rabbi, 233, 244
- vanitas* imagery, 242–244
- Veer, Cornelia van der (1639–c. 1702), poet, 305, 306
- Veer, Gerrit de (fl. 1570–1598), writer, 304
- Velde, Esaias van de (1587–1630), artist, 253
- Venice, 15, 25, 115, 318
- Vermeer, Johannes (1632–1675), artist, 1, 25, 149, 255, 268, 283, 284, 286, 309, 357, 390, 392
- The Lacemaker* (c. 1670–1671), 284
- Vinckboons, David (c. 1576–1632), artist, 274, 275, 278
- Country Fair* (c. 1629), 275, 275
- Vingboons, Justus (c. 1620–1698), architect, 321
- Riddarhuset* (1653), 321
- Vingboons, Justus (c. 1620–1698), architect
- Vingboons, Philips (c. 1607–1678), architect, 321
- Virgil, 2, 5, 145, 257, 302
- Aeneid*, 302
- Visscher, Anna Roemers (1584–c. 1651), poet and artist, 296, 297
- Visscher, Claes Jansz, (c. 1586–1652), artist, printer, publisher and art dealer, 134
- Visscher, Maria Tesselschade Roemers (1594–1649), poet and artist, 296, 297
- Visscher, Pieter Roemer (1547–1620), poet and merchant, 241, 242, 289, 296, 297, 298
- Jabberings* (Brabbeling, (1614), 297
- Sinnepoppen* (1614), 242, 297
- Vlamingh van Oudshoorn, Arnold de (1618–1662), Governor of Ambon (1647–1655), 166
- Vlissingen, 24, 83
- VOC. *See* Dutch East India Company (VOC)
- Voetianism, Voetians, 201–203. *See also* Cocceianism
- Voetius, Gisbertus (1589–1676), theologian, 197, 198, 200, 201, 202, 340, 352. *See also* Voetianism
- Vondel, Joost van den (1587–1679), poet and playwright, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 25, 126, 142, 143, 144, 145, 234, 244, 257, 289, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 314, 320, 322, 323, 325
- ‘In Praise of Navigation’ (‘Het lof der Zeevaert’, 1623), 301
- Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637), 301, 302, 303
- ‘In the Scales’ (‘Op de Waeg-schael’), 143
- Jeptha* (1659), 302, 303
- Lucifer* (1653), 302, 303, 314
- Palamedes* (1625), 145, 302
- Vorstius, Aelius Everhardus (1565–1624), physician, botanist and professor at Leiden, 343
- Vos, Jan (1612–1667), poet and playwright, 136, 303, 306, 314, 315, 320, 321, 323, 324, 325
- Aran en Titus* (1641), 314, 323
- Medea* (1667), 315, 323, 325
- Vossius, Gerardus (1577–1649), humanist scholar, 322, 342
- Poeticae Institutiones* (1647), 322
- vroedschappen*. *See* town councils
- Wagner, Zacharias (1614–1668), German artist, merchant and governor of the Dutch Cape Colony, 180, 181, 182
- Slave Market at Recife* (1630s–1640s), 181
- Thierbuch*, 181
- Walten, Ericus (1663–1697), writer, 126, 379, 386
- De regtsinnige Policy* (1689), 379
- War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714). *See* Spain, War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714)
- waterschappen*, 35, 43
- Weede van Dijkvelt, Everard van (1626–1702), diplomat, 111
- welfare organisations, 19, 22, 56, 343. *See also* orphanages
- Wesembecke, Jacob van (1523–1577), Pensionary of Antwerp (1556–1567), 128
- West India Company (WIC). *See* Dutch West India Company (WIC)
- Westphalia, Peace of (1648), 8, 79, 87, 140. *See also* Münster, Peace of
- Wildt, Hiob de (1637–1704), secretary of Amsterdam Admiralty Board, 77
- William II (1626–1650), Prince of Orange (1647), Stadholder of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Gelderland, Groningen, Drenthe (1647–1650), 94, 98, 139, 140, 371, 390
- William III (1650–1702), Prince of Orange (1650), Stadholder of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht and Westerwolde (1672–1702), Gelderland and Overijssel (1675–1702), and Drenthe (1696–1702), King of England, Scotland and Ireland (1689–1702), 8, 77, 99, 99, 111, 112, 119, 120, 371, 373, 377, 379, 380, 393
- William of Orange (1533–1584), Stadholder of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht (1559–1567 and 1572–1584), of Brabant (1577–1584) and Stadholder of Friesland (1580–1584), 6, 7, 8, 70, 71, 90, 91, 99, 100, 102, 128, 140, 292, 294, 295, 396
- windmills. *See* mills

- With, Witte Cornelisz de (1599–1658), admiral, 100
- Witsen, Nicolaes (1641–1717), writer and Amsterdam regent, 361
- Witt, Cornelis de (1623–1672), Dordrecht regent, 125, 139
- Witt, Johan de (1625–1672), Grand Pensionary of Holland (1653–1672), 8, 94, 100, 113, 118, 119, 120, 125, 131, 135, 140, 354, 371
Deduction, 140
 murder of, 119, 120, 139
- Witte, Emanuel de (1617–1692), artist, 227, 228, 229, 241
Portuguese Synagogue (1680), 227, 228, 241
- Wittichius, Christopher (1625–1687), theologian, 202
- Wolsgryn, Aert (late 17th), publisher, 376, 386
The Life of Philopater (1697), 376
- Zaan, 18, 154
- Zaydān, Mulay (–1627), Sultan of Morocco (1603–1627), 231
- Zeeland, 18, 20, 34, 35, 38, 40, 43, 45, 51, 52, 62, 72, 83, 91, 95, 110, 120, 152, 167, 169, 170, 189, 191, 192, 204, 210, 249, 251, 291, 294, 295, 300, 371, 377, 380
- Zeelandia, Fort (Suriname), 83, 178
- zielverkopers* (sellers of souls), 81
- Zijpe, De, 152
- Zuiderzee, 35, 38, 42, 45, 47, 155
- Zutphen, 38, 58
- Zwolle, 19, 24, 38, 58, 149, 216, 376, 378, 383